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(No. 9.)

THE SLAVE SCULPTOR.

CHAPTER I.

THE AZTEC CAPITAL, AND ITS GREATEST BEAUTY.

PROBABLY no period of this continent's history, is of deeper interest to the American people, than that of the Aztec race, previous to and during the invasion and conquest of Mexico, by HERNANDO COREZ.

At that time great numbers in the Mexican capital and adjacent towns, were possessed of a knowledge of arts and sciences, and of mental qualities, which compared favorably with the Old World civilization. The great valley of Mexico was then one vast field of loveliness. The ancient capital was situated in the center, and surrounded by the crystal waters of Tezcoco; over which three grand causeways formed the only approach to the city, except by royal barges, or canoes of the natives.

This lake was interspersed with floating islands which rose and fell with the gentle undulation of the waves, and moved as by enchantment, over the waters. They were jubilant with the sweet notes of rare plumed songsters.

The streets, the squares, and, in fact, every available space in the capital, was adorned with trees and shrubs of the most luxuriant growth, and flowers grew everywhere. The atmosphere was laden with delicious odor, arising from the myriad flower-beds, and was cooled by the spray of numerous fountains in the gardens, where they kept their ceaseless play amid statues, ornaments, and columns of polished porphyry.

This was the great Aztec capital. In certain portions of it, there were long vistas of low stone and mud houses, nearly concealed by the intermingling foliage of trees; while, in other sections, were gorgeous palaces embosomed in forests of cypress, and surrounded with all the splendors of a not unrefined taste. Temples of the most magnificent structure arose at frequent intervals, and were marked even in the distance by their tall gilded spires.

Surrounded with all this grandeur, and apparent civilization, the mass of the people were, comparatively, semi-barbarians. Their monarchy was despotic. The will of the emperor was unquestioned,

and his court was maintained with the most regal splendor; yet the monarch thought it no disgrace to assist, personally, in the inhuman service of the church.

Their religion was characterized with the most cruel barbarism. In the name of their idols, the lives of men, women, and children, were freely sacrificed in the most painful and revolting manner. Even the dead, thus slaughtered, were — in supposed command of these deities — made the subject of *cannibal feasts*, in which all classes appeared equally interested.

The stirring incidents of our story transpired during the period immediately preceding, and at the time of the invasion of that empire by Cortez; and while we seek to interest the reader in our story we shall present life pictures of the Aztecs as they were in the days of MONTEZUMA.

Conspicuous in that portion of the capital where the nobles resided, was a large palace, which stood in a thick forest of cypress, presenting an appearance of grandeur seldom witnessed. There were cool walks, sparkling fountains, and lakes swarming with gay-colored fish. The choicest flowers bloomed on every hand. Corridors with lattice screens, covered with sweet-scented honeysuckle, encircled the buildings. Balconies overlooked the ever-present park, and the turreted roof was verdant with foliage.

In the year 1519, this palace was the residence of Lord Ahuitzol — a descendant of a former Aztec king. He was over sixty years of age, a shrewd, intelligent man, whose presence and advice were considered of importance, and he was therefore chosen one of Montezuma's confidential counselors.

Attached to his estate, were some two hundred slaves; yet his immediate family consisted only of himself, one son — Toluca — and an adopted daughter — Mazina — the former twenty-five, the latter twenty-one years of age. Lady Ahuitzol had been dead several years.

Mazina formerly was Ahuitzol's slave. When about one year old she was purchased of a man who came from the eastern coast. Though her skin at first was copper-hued, it had probably been colored, for it soon became clear and white. As she grew in years her form developed into exquisite proportion and beauty, and her mind betrayed unusual intelligence. She arrested the attention of Montezuma; who, interesting himself in her behalf she became the adopted daughter of the old nobleman. She received marked favors from the emperor, and became a great favorite at his court.

It was a lovely evening in May, of the year named. The sun had just disappeared behind the western mountains when Mazina came from the palace for a stroll through the park. She was habited in the costume of ladies of her rank, consisting of four skirts, differing in length, and highly ornamented. Over these, was a loose robe of gaudy feather-work, decorated with gold work, pearls, emeralds,

and *chalchivitl* — (a green stone of high estimation among the Aztecs) — and fringed with gold lace and silver. The garment reached to the ground, and was held around the waist by a *maxtlatl* or sash of fine cotton texture, richly embroidered with feathers of the humming-bird and bedecked with gold. Her arms were bare though the robe fitted close around her neck. Her raven hair floated in luxuriant tresses over her shoulders, contrasting with her fair complexion, which did not exhibit one tinge of the dusky, cinnamon hue, peculiar to the features of the aborigines.

Mazina walked onward, with a queen-like tread; yet her gaze was downcast, and her countenance overspread with gloom. Following her came two female attendants, carrying wreaths of flowers, and cups of perfumery. She moved on over walks paved with polished prophyry, until she reached a bower in the farthest corner of the park. Dismissing her slaves, she entered the arbor, to find a seat within its retiracy.

Her mind appeared troubled, for she gave herself up to profound meditation. She sat there, till the shades of evening gathered into twilight — twilight into gloom. The rippling sound of a fountain near the arbor, had lulled her to repose. Her hands lay carelessly upon her lap, and her head drooped forward upon her bosom. While thus unconscious, a short thick-set man, with black robe, and black cowl or mask, that concealed his head and face, came cautiously toward the arbor.

Reaching the entrance he paused, watched the sleeper for a moment, listened to her breathing, then entered. Approaching close to her side, he knelt upon the stone floor, raised his mask, and gazed upon her features as best he could through the uncertain light. He then bowed his head, and, for a minute appeared to weep. When his feelings had somewhat subsided, he removed from his bosom a curiously wrought locket, to which was attached a short gold chain, and clasped it around her neck. Then replacing the mask, he arose and walked quickly away. As he did so another person rose from a prostrate position not six feet distant, and gazed steadily upon the receding man, until he had entirely disappeared. Then he heard the dip of a paddle in the water of a prophyry-paved canal, which passed through the park, connecting the waters of an artificial lake with those of Tezcoco. He again crouched on the earth. Presently he detected the outlines of a man approaching and immediately recognized the form to be that of Toluca — Ahuitzol's son. Grasping the hilt of his *itztli* knife, he crawled cautiously toward the arbor.

CHAPTER II.

THE SLAVE SCULPTOR.

Two hours preceding this adventure by the arbor, in a large apartment of a low stone house, or shop, was a young man, some twenty-one years of age. In stature he was tall, and his form was athletically developed. His dress was that usually worn by the laboring class, showing clearly the outlines of his muscular frame. A close-fitting wrapper reached from his neck to his hips, leaving his arms bare to the shoulders. From his waist to the ankles, were wide, loose pants, held at the loins by a belt, and gathered at the bottom. On his feet were plain leather sandals, while a curiously wrought cap covered his head. A heavy mass of long dark hair fell over his shoulders. His face was evenly but strongly featured, while its expression was one of high intelligence, resolution and tenderness combined.

This man was Maxtla Ytzcoalt—a renowned sculptor, who until eighteen years of age had been a slave. At that age he managed to purchase his freedom, when, being possessed of the ingenuity of a sculptor, and possessing unusual powers of execution, he readily outstripped all competitors, and became a leading spirit among the members of his profession, which then numbered many artists of real greatness.

His workshop consisted of but two apartments. The front room which occupied the greater portion of the house was used as a studio, in which he was constantly employed. His business being the furnishing of ornaments for temples and dwellings of noblemen, gave him an intimate acquaintance with the ruling men of the priesthood, and an enviable position among the nobility, and his studio was proportioned to the patronage he received.

The rear apartment was that in which he slept, and he appeared to guard it closely. There was, apparently, but one entrance to the building, and that was in front.

Maxtla had concluded his day's work, and sat down by the door to rest. It was just in the dusk of evening, and he was thoughtfully watching the throng of citizens, passing and repassing along the street. At this moment, a short, compactly framed man, with a black mask and cloak, walked boldly into the studio, and cast a quick furtive glance around. The sculptor recognized the man, as one whom he had often seen, and who appeared to manifest great interest in his behalf; yet he had never looked upon his face, for, upon all occasions it was closely masked. The long, sable robe at once

revealed his holy office of priest. All such being privileged persons, their movements were unquestioned. On this occasion he appeared agitated, and hastily remarked :—

"One you love is in danger. Enemies are plotting her ruin and yours. Be wary! Be cautious! or she will be snatched from you, and you fall beneath the sacrificial knife."

Maxtha sprang to his feet, and words of inquiry were trembling on his lips, but the door closed upon the receding form, almost before they were pronounced. For a few moments Maxtha paced to and fro, his hand clasped upon his breast.

"Twas a strange affinity," he murmured to himself, "that brought us together. She was a slave, so was I. Our past is identical and dull. A mystery compasses our origin. We certainly are unlike those with whom we are surrounded. Is it this fact which draws us so closely together? Our hearts cling strangely to each other! Oh! Mazua, Mazua! I will hasten to your side, in this hour of danger!"

Throwing his *tlacalli*, or cloak, over his shoulders, he walked forth from the studio, securing the door after him.

A tall, slender form, enveloped in a plain black robe, his head covered with a heavy mass of long, coarse white hair, approached the rear of the building, and entered Maxtha's studio by a secret doorway, as the sculptor passed from sight from the front door. Closing the small door quietly, the man removed from beneath his robe a curiously constructed light, which illumined the room sufficiently to observe distinctly such objects as were in it. The room was the sculptor's private apartment. On one side, in a reclining position, was a life-size statue in porphyry, of Montezuma. It was a noble piece of work, and the secret visitor appeared highly pleased while viewing it. The carving of the head and torso was all complete, and the lower limbs were roughly defined. After thoroughly examining the statue, the stranger disappeared by the secret door through which he had gained entrance.

Meanwhile Maxtha continued onward, and soon reached the great park surrounding Lord Alauitz's palace. He moved slowly forward, carefully scanning every object around him. Suddenly he detected the form of the priest who had visited him at his studio. He watched his movements until he saw him enter the arbor in the private park. Creeping noiselessly forward, Maxtha peered through the vines and beheld the priest kneeling in front of Mazua, who appeared to be asleep.

This singular movement startled the young man; yet knowing it would be death to interfere with a priest he tremblingly waited the result. How great was his relief, then, to see the cowl'd visitor leave the arbor, pass off across the park, and disappear! Maxtha then stepped forward, and was about to enter the bower when he

heard the sound of dipping oars in the canal. He instantly crept on the earth again. A moment more and Toluca Ahuitztl, with his long plumes and glittering robes, came stealthily toward the bower. Springing to his feet Maxtha exclaimed: "You cannot enter the arbor, Mazina is asleep, and does not wish to be disturbed."

Toluca, with a hoarse, taunting laugh, struck a powerful blow at the sculptor. Maxtha caught his arm and with apparent ease, sent him whizzing away, with such force as to bring him to the ground.

The astonished Toluca arose quickly, and hurried away toward the palace. These movements aroused Mazina from her slumber, and she came forth from the arbor.

"Why, Maxtha! you here? What has happened? Did I not hear angry words? I must have fallen asleep."

"'Twas nothing serious; but why are you thus tremulous?"

"Did I not hear the voice of Toluca?"

"He was here."

"Did you offend him?"

"I forbade his entering the arbor. He struck at me, and I hurled him away."

Mazina moved nearer the side of her companion, and in a low whisper, replied:

"I am sorry, for he is a desperate man."

"I do not fear him;" and there was a peculiar expression upon his features.

"Ah! Maxtha, you do not know what he may do. He has powerful friends, and may accomplish your ruin, perhaps, death."

At that moment they were interrupted. Three athletic men rushed precipitately into the arbor, and Maxtha heard the voice of Toluca, saying:

"Secure him, dead or alive! but do not harm the lady."

The sculptor sprang forward, grasped the right arm of the foremost assailant, and with a quick motion wrenched it from his assailant's hand a heavy *mayaquahuitl*,* or sword. Then, throwing his left arm around the waist of the frightened Mazina, he raised her from the ground, dashed furiously upon his foes, and drove them all from the arbor.

Following up their retreat, Maxtha fought with the spirit of desperation. In the heat of the contest, the white-hairee stranger, whom we saw at the sculptor's studio, appeared upon the scene, and with one stroke of his long spear, broke down the guard of the three assassins.

At this unexpected interruption the assailants fled, leaving Maxtha and Mazina with the mysterious personage. There appeared to

* The *mayaquahuitl* was a formidable weapon among the Aztecs. It was a two-bladed steel, at the middle having a sharp point, at regular intervals, were inserted transversely, sharp points of iron, which made it nearly as terrible as a keen edge, linking a ring to a wedge, when thus fully handled.

be a magic influence in his presence, which inspired them with a feeling of awe; and, involuntarily, they stepped backward, before his keen searching glance. For one moment he stood leaning upon his spear; then slowly raised his left arm, stretched it out toward the palace, and with a significant gesture, motioned them away. Without a word, Maxtla and Mazina withdrew; when the white-haired stranger strode haughtily away.

Mazina sought her own room, where, throwing herself upon a couch, she lay tortured with painful reflections.

The events of the evening had made a deep impression upon the Sculptor's mind, as he walked along the dark streets, he endeavored to fathom the probable result of his adventure. Reaching his studio, he entered by the secret passage; and for some time remained in a deep study in the darkness. At length procuring a light, he commenced working upon the statue.

CHAPTER III.

THE TWO VOWS.

Let us take the reader back a few hours previous to Mazina's leaving the palace for the arbor in the park. Lord Ahuitz I was seated in a spacious saloon of his palace. The apartment was enormous though not lofty. The ceiling was of cedarous wood, ingeniously carved, and the floor was covered with mats of palm-leaves. The walls were hung with gorgeous draperies of feather-work, wrought in imitation of birds, insects, and flowers, with a curious art, and a glowing radiance of colors that presented a gorgeous appearance. Clouds of incense rose up from censers, and diffused sweet odors through the apartment.

The old nobleman was reclining upon a cushioned seat, drawn up in front of an open casement, overlooking the park. A beauteous slave girl stood near him with a fan in one hand, and a bouquet of flowers in the other.

She was about twenty years of age, and was dressed in the style peculiar to serving maid-servants in the aristocratic palaces of the Aztec nobles. Her form was stately though symmetrically developed, and her features well modelled. Her complexion was of a much lighter shade than usual among the Aztecs. Her eyes were dark, keen, piercing. Her thick, glossy hair hung in flowing masses, and reached to her waist. The expression of her countenance was composed; yet, a sly inkling of desire lurked in the corners of her eyes, and an unquenching purpose lay asleep in her thin lips and flexible nostrils.

She was a singular person, possessed of a singular disposition.

For her friends she would do any thing;—but it was a great
to make for the object of her affection; while, for her enemies, no
amount of hate or scorn was sufficient to arrest her desire for re-
venge. Her name was Meztli.

"Meztli, where is Toluca?" the old Indian said, suddenly.

"My lord, I could not tell," replied the slave.

"Find him, and bring him to my presence."

Toluca entered the apartment, wearing the gay girdle and ample
square cloak of the nation. It was a garment composed of the
finest cotton, the four corners of which were gathered up around his
neck. On his feet were sandals of soft-tanned leather, richly orna-
mented with gold. Both sandals and cloak were bedecked with
feathers, pearls, and precious stones; a *topaz* was the cap, which was
the brilliant plumage of the humming-bird, surrounded with emer-
ald and *chalchihuitl*. Upon his head rested a *peacock* of plumes,
which floated gracefully down his back. With a proud, commanding
air, the young man approached his father.

"Did you send for me?" he asked.

"I did, my son. Draw up a seat, and sit down. I will speak
with you."

"I will listen," was the reply; and the speaker placed a low stool
in front of his father.

"Have you seen any thing more of that strange black-robed
priest?"

"Not lately," said the young man, sitting down on the stool.

"What do you think of him? Do you understand his move-
ments?"

"I cannot imagine what he is after, or why he should be lurking
around the palace."

"There is a mystery about this affair, and it must be laid bare.
Have you kept a close watch as I requested?"

"Yes, but I have detected nothing that would warrant any alarm.
He frequently walks through the park, sometimes alone, then again in company with another priest, yet he never appears to
notice any thing around him."

"Does he continue to wear the mask?"

"Yes, he always appears in the same robes. We also thought
on the occasion of his strange interruption at the time we thought
to rid ourselves of that black-robed priest."

"By the way, have you seen this Mexican lately?"

"Not since that particular occasion."

"I want you to take all the slaves you can find, and bring them to
this palace. I have a place for him here, where he will be safe, and
trouble us no more."

"I will take him the first opportunity, but he has powerful friends,
and it would be madness to attempt his capture without a plan."

"Well, well; take your own course, but bring him here! That
is my order. I will attend to him after he is once in the palace."

"Your command shall be obeyed. He stands too much in my way for me to remain inactive."

"Is Mazina less delicate, since my last interviews with her?"

"Not a particle," and there was a sudden contracting of the muscle upon his face. "She asserts boldly that she cannot love me, and that she will not marry me."

"She shall, Teluea! or she shall feel the vengeance of my power. I will not allow the heartless ingrate to trample upon my authority. Teluea! she shall be your wife! I swear it!" and the old Indian grew red in the face, as he gesticulated fiercely.

A low, suppressed laugh startled them. They searched the apartment; but discovered nothing near. After a short silence, during which they listened in vain for a repetition of the sound, Larl Aluitzol continued:

"Go and say to Mazina, that I would see her."

"I will do so," and the young man left the saloon.

That moment Meztli glided cautiously away from under the open casement, disappeared among the shrubbery, and immediately entered the palace.

Teluea soon returned stating that Mazina was in the park, that she had dismissed her attendants at the bower. A flash of suspicion shot across his mind. He started suddenly as if some quick impulse moved him, and, without waiting his father's reply, hastily left the room. Taking a slave with him, he was soon seated in a barge, gliding swiftly over the water of a narrow canal, toward the arbor.

The result of that expedition has been narrated.

The slaves fled precipitately, on the first appearance of the white-laden man, and even Teluea himself, could but wonder at the unexpected and efficient interruption.

Without visiting Larl Aluitzol on his return, Teluea repaired directly to the eastern bower of the palace, overlooking the park, in the direction of the scene, where seating himself in a thick bower of vines, he endeavored to ease his perturbed mind. At the same time he did not forget to keep a strict watch through the park, as far as his eyes could reach. For many moments he was startled by a light noise, and Meztli stood before him.

She laid her sun-tan'd hand upon his shoulder, bowed her head forward till her lips almost touched his cheek, then, in a low whisper said:

"I thought you would be here alone, and I came to see you, Teluea. You used to ask me to tell my own, but now I am too weary. Your thoughts have turned toward another, and to all else I am as away as worthless. Say, is it not so?"

Mazina made an impudent gesture, yet, she quietly continued:

"Teluea, why make those fair pretences only for purposes of your own? Did you promise to give me my freedom, and make me your beloved wife, when no such purpose was ever settled in your heart?"

I am not blind, Tchern; I see that which passes around me, and I know that you have deceived me. I have been foolish to you, as I you have repaid it — how?"

"Have I promised anything which I have not fulfilled? Away! you are my father's slave! Dare to speak to me again upon such a subject, and I will send you a victim to the insatiate gods of the *teocallis*!"

Mezli sprang back ; her face turned to a deathly pallor ; yet, with a clear voice, she replied :—

"Farewell, Telusa, you have enjoyed my love; you shall experience my hate. I have no fears of the *bocallis*. The very instant you take that step, I will"—and leaning forward he whispered in his ear. He started like one stricken to the heart, sprang to his feet, and his countenance depicted the keenest anguish and terror.

Meztli watched these emotions with apparent satisfaction, and there was a wicked smile on her lips as she added:

"Yes, Telucx, you will curse the day that b— I were born, if you do not fulfill the promise you made me. I don't believe you know! No! I hate the very ground you stand upon; yet I will have you bound to me — I would feel you in my power — would see you at my feet! Then — then base deceiver, will I ~~speak~~ you as your deeds deserve. Away! I say. Away! from me forever!"

"Say, Meztli;"' gasped Tolac. "Where, where will you learn—"

"Away!" she interrupted, with a hasty gesture. "I am your father's slave, as you have said," and her lip curled with a contemptuous smile, but dare to speak again, and I will whisper these mystic words in the hearing of our emperor. Then who will be most likely to find their way to the *tschille*?"

With a defiant expression, Meztili passed hurriedly away, and left Toluca to meditate at leisure.

The young gentleman paused to adjust his cap to the brim, his arms folded, his gaze downward, his mind in a frenzied state. Presently he halted abruptly, struck his heel upon his boot and muttered,

"I have it. Cruzillo's dungeons are strong, and will be a fit place for both general and slave. I will hasten and make the arrangements — prepare the apartments for their special benefit. Then we will see who has the most power to accomplish what I want — I or the ministers in my way. Ha! Ha!" He evidently relished his wish,

and immediately entered the palace. Soon he was passing across the park; his gay robe and plumes had been removed, and, in their stead, was a cap and a plain black cloak.

He continued his walk until he had reached a long distance from the palace, and was traversing a narrow, dismal street, in a less frequented portion of the capital. Suddenly he paused in front of a large stone house, gazed cautiously around, then knocked upon the door.

"Who is there?" was questioned from within.

Three rataplan rays were given, when the door was immediately opened. Quickly entering, the door was closed and secured.

The warden of this grim place was a tall, muscular man, with a countenance indicative of brutal passions, yet the familiarity between him and the young nobleman appeared to be congenial and intimate.

"Well, my lord Ahuitz!" exclaimed the man, when his visitor was seated. "To what enterprise am I indebted for this visit?"

"A glorious scheme, Cruzilli;" responded Tolucan.

"So I suppose; but you are agitated! What's the matter. Has any trouble?"

"Yes, I have; and have work for you."

"That's good news; what can I do?"

"You know Maxtla, the sculptor?"

"I do."

"Could you get him into one of your dungeons?"

"Easily."

"He stands in my way — between me and the object of my affection. Do you understand?"

"I think I do."

"Will you prevent his troubling me again?"

"I will, my lord."

"Your pay shall be ample."

"I know who my friends are, and on whom I can call. Is that all I can do for you?"

"No! Do you know Maxtla — father's favorite slave?"

"Can't say that I do."

"If she was pointed out to you, would you place her out of the way?"

"Yes, if it would serve you, by so doing."

"I would have her removed. She will cause me trouble."

"Then it shall be done."

CHAPTER IV.

THE SLAVE GIRL ON THE ALERT.

LEAVING these two villains, let us return to Metzli, and follow her, after she left the balcony.

Instead of entering the palace, as Toloca supposed, she passed entirely around the building, yet remained upon the balcony, and approached nearer to him without being detected. In this close proximity, she listened to the audible words which he uttered, and watched him until he entered the palace. Then, with all possible dispatch, she descended to the park, secreting herself where she could watch his movements.

She dogged his steps to the stone house, marked the locality, and returned to the palace undetected. Gliding along the great hall, she ascended the grand staircase, and stood before the door leading into Mazina's apartment. Her features indicated acute suffering. Her limbs trembled, her breath was fitful, and she leaned against the wall for support. One moment only she hesitated; then her nerves appeared to recover. She cautiously opened the door. All was quiet. She leaned her head forward, and listened. She heard the gentle breathing of one in sleep; then cautiously entered. There lay Mazina upon her couch. Her pillow was wet with tears, and her cheeks were ashen-pale. One arm lay beneath her head, while the other lay across her bosom, as white as the rigid clasp-ster.

Metzli gazed upon the sleeper with a fixed purpose to wreak upon her some vengeance; for had not Mazina come between her and the man to whom she had given her very soul's life? But that sorrowful face disarmed her; and a low groan which then escaped Mazina's lips, sent a great pang of pity to the heart of the slave. Tears were in her eyes as she stole from the room.

Mazina awoke as the girl passed out. She seemed half conscious that some one had been bending over her, for she saw, in her vision, a guardian spirit which filled her breast with strength and joy as she became fully awake.

The locket upon her bosom attracted her attention. What was the curious thing? She had never before seen such an ornament upon any Aztec's breast. Where did it come from? she asked. Pressing its neck, up flew the lid, and then disclosed to her startled vision was an exquisitely painted face. It was of a woman; and oh, how like Mazina's own features! It was *her* life — as if it was her, as she would be, if years had added to her womanly grace. Verily it

was a mystery. She kissed the bauble and wept over it -- she knew not why.

While pondering over the experiences of the few preceding hours, she was summoned to an interview with the old Lord Ahuitzol.

Secreting the precious locket beneath her robe, she descended with a faltering step, to the apartments below.

She was self-possessed and calm — betraying nothing of the trying scene through which she had so lately passed. With wonderful power she concealed her emotions, deep down in her heart, bound there by a will and purpose unrequited.

As Mazina entered, the slave girl arose with a smile, advanced, sprinkled a few drops of sweet essence upon her head, and strewed a bouquet of flowers upon the floor, over which she would pass. She then caught Mazina's hand, knelt before her with the hand pressed to her lips, then arose, and conducted her to a seat, near the side of the old Indian. She then returned to her stool, sat down, and commenced arranging another bouquet from a larger quantity of flowers, in one corner of the apartment.

"Meztli," sternly spoke the noble; "you can retire. When I require your services, I will send for you."

Initterently the slave arose and passed from the room, only to crouch beneath an open casement where she could hear every word that passed between Lord Ahuitzol and his ward.

"Mazina, what about this young sculptor — Maxtla? Strange proceedings between you and him, have been reported to me. What does it all mean?" commanded the old noble, changing his position so as to face his ward.

"I don't know what you have heard;" she replied, timidly.

"Was Maxtla in the park, last evening?"

"He was."

"Did you hold any conversation with him?"

"I did."

"Of what were you speaking?"

Mazina's face crimsoned, and she hesitated.

Lord Ahuitzol did not affect to notice her embarrassment, and continued:

"I am acquainted with all the proceedings of that occasion, and I do assure you, it pains me to think that I have a ward thus ungrateful, when all the circumstances are considered."

"Indeed, my lord! I do not know what you mean;" and Mazina appeared greatly troubled.

"Then I will tell you in as few words as possible; you will then fully understand your position, and my desires. In the first place, you was my slave, afterward you became my daughter by adoption. This step was taken that you might be placed on a footing equal with myself; and thus an alliance between you and him could be effected. This ultimate event, was the sole object of my desires."

"I could not, indeed I could not ever love Tolaca. He is so dif-

ferent from me. His dispositions, sentiments, and, in fact, every feeling, are directly opposed to mine. I could never consent to such an alliance;" and Mazina began to weep.

"You will!" he exclaimed, quickly; flying into a fierce passion.

"You will marry Telura. That is settled. I give you my word, that you shall; and I mean what I say. Away! Leave me, ere I forget myself."

Mazina did not wait a second command. She left the saloon, immediately.

There was a smile and a frown upon Merill's face, as she crept cautiously away from the window.

Mazina ascended to the corridor, and walked onward, until she reached a secluded corner, screened by vines, which had clambered up the side of the palace. Here she sat down, and for a while gave free expression to her feelings, in a copious flow of tears.

She was completely screened from observation, by the thick intermingling foliage, with which she was surrounded. As the calm succeeds the storm, so did Mazina's grief sink into a quiet reverie, broken only by an occasional sob, the sobbing throes of an ever-grieved heart. The past came up before her like a picture, whose pictures were drawn from life. She saw herself, a child—a slave, compelled to perform menial services. She grew, but still expanded, and reached out for something which it did not possess. There was a void in her heart, a failing of desire, of aspiration. In her dreams she fancied associations and scenes of comfort to come around her, they were exciting, and made her heart beat with joy. From these dreams she awoke to the stern realities of her slave life. Years passed. The slave became a nubile girl. Suddenly by adoption. With one step she had passed from poverty and to wealth and distinction. Still, she was not happy. The slave did not fail to remove that feeling of oppression and gloom which still existed in her heart. It was a happy recollection of the boyhood of her childhood, Mantua. How was she now? Oh, how many hours of pure peace and joy had they enjoyed together! But that happy period given way to the more ordinary condition of slavery, and the constituent had grown with their growth, until their hearts beat like chords in harmony. In her prosperity, she did not forget him. He was struggling for his freedom, and she secretly aided him. With her assistance, he succeeded, though at no small sacrifice of his profession. Now what a sorrow was it when it turned out her happiness and the life of one she held so dear!

She was startled from her reverie by a sudden noise, proceeding along the corridor. Her heart beat fast. As she bent up his features, and, dimly, saw his face, she clasped her hand, and pressed it fervently to her lips. The quick pulse beat, and started suddenly back. Her eyes closed, and her head lowered, and her heart sank within her.

"Dearst Mazina!" he exclaimed, his countenance of the most

humble suppliant. "Will you not listen to me? Can you not love me? Oh, speak that word, which would make me so happy!"

Mazina did not speak. She remained as a statue, while he continued:—

"Mazina, I have long loved you,—loved you with all my heart. I cannot live without you. Say, dear Mazina, will you be mine?"

"That can not be," she replied. "You know ere you asked, what my answer must be. I have told you I can not be your wife. Why will you persecute me again?"

Telucu rose slowly to his feet. There was a glance in his wicked eye that filled her heart with fearful apprehension. There was no doubt of his hateful purpose of revenge and injury.

"You shall be mine!" he hissed, taking a step forward; "or you shall be—"

"Hell! foul miscreant!" shouted a voice, scarce with passion. "Fly for your life or I will hurl your vile carcass from the corriker. Away!"

The baffled villain turned and fled the strange priest, standing there like an avenger. Telucu fled precipitately, and his cars were saluted, as he hurried away, by the low, mocking laugh of Metzli, who had witnessed all.

CHAPTER V.

THE DOOR OF THE LOVERS.

While these events were taking place on the corriker, at Lord Almiztli's place, Maxtha Ytrecht was busily engaged in his studio. He had labored nearly all the previous night upon the statue, in his secret apartment, and was looking forward to an early day for its completion, when he would surprise the employer with such an offering as no man had ever received. He was not aware that any person except himself knew of this undertaking; yet, it had been more than a year since he commenced the work.

The meridian of the day had arrived, still Maxtha was busily engaged. At that moment, a tall, ungainly, rough-featured individual entered the studio. The sculptor looked up, recognized the person, and remarked:—

"Ah! Cruzli, a pleasant day."

"Well, yes, indeed. Got plenty of work now?"

"More than I can do."

"Sorry for that."

"Why?" said the sculptor, scanning the features of his visitor, with a keen glance.

"Because I have work for you, myself;" the man replied coolly.
"Ah! perhaps I can do it. What's to be done?"

"You will have to accompany me to my residence in order to learn. The work will have to be performed there; and I am in a great hurry for it."

"How long will it take?"

"I could not say. Not long, I think."

"When do you want me?"

"This, or to-morrow evening you can come and see what I want, then do the work as soon as possible."

"I will come to-morrow evening."

"Very well, I shall expect you at dark."

"I will be there."

Cruzilli immediately left the studio, well pleased with his success; while Maxtha, unconscious of the villain's game, continued with his labor, his thoughts upon the fair Mazina. Until last he labored undisturbed, then walked forth, toward Lerl Ahuitzotl's place.

Entering the park surrounding the home of his beloved, he moved slowly along beneath the tall cypresses, picking his way among thick shrubbery and vines, in the most secluded parts of the garden.

While passing through a cluster of interlacing foliage, he heard a low sob, and paused. Again he heard the sob, this time accompanied by a prolonged sigh. Pushing the bushes aside, he stepped forward into a small opening. It was quite dark, yet he saw the outline of a woman. That it was her for whom he was seeking his heart told him.

"Mazina!"

"Maxtha! Oh, I am so glad that you have come!"

They were soon seated upon the grassy mound, from which Mazina had just arisen, when Maxtha asked anxiously:—

"Why this unusual sadness? You were last night, until quite recently."

"No, Maxtha," was the low reply. "It is not natural for me to be sad; but my sorrows are more than I can tell."

She then related the substance of her interview with Lerl Ahuitzotl, and the threat of Toluca. Mazina appeared greatly agitated while relating the circumstances, and said:—

"I have but one friend at the present."

"Who is that?" inquired Maxtha, looking still upon the couch which she had narrated.

"It is Meztli!"

"Ahuitzotl's slave?"

"Yes; she appears to be very kindly. When I first sought her advice, I do not know what I should have done. I think she is good hearted and loves me."

"I fear Mazina, that you are deceived in her. So now I have taken a great dislike to her. I look upon her as possessed of a wicked heart; yet I hope I am mistaken."

"Oh, Maxtha! you are surely mistaken. There could no person be more kind to me than she has been."

"I trust you may not be deceived, yet I would caution you not to confide in her too far until you have thoroughly tested her fidelity."

"Maxtha! if we were alone, far away from these scenes, entirely alone — in a wilderness — in the mountains, anywhere, utterly alone — we should be happy. It seems that I have no friend in the world but you. All others are enemies;" and leaning her head against his shoulder, she gave way to her grief.

"We shall, dear Mazina," he replied, "some day realize the full extent of our hopes. We shall triumph over enemies, and O! Mazina, will we not be happy? For years we have struggled against fearful odds. We have been slaves together. Our past is a deep mystery, yet our hearts, from the first, appeared to draw toward each other by strong cords — sometimes they seemed stronger than mere love. Oh, that I could raise the veil from the past — that I could look back to our childhood — our infancy, yea, birth and parentage. I —"

A motion in the bushes interrupted them. The white-haired stranger stepped into the opening.

One moment his gaze rested upon the lovers; then quickly raising his right hand he pointed, with a significant motion toward the palace; a silent yet imperative command which caused Maxtha and Mazina to spring to their feet. The stranger passed on, and disappeared among the bushes.

Maxtha and his companion quickly left the retreat, and hurried toward the palace. As they passed along, Maxtha's quick eye detected the forms of three men, crouched on the earth close to where they had been seated; yet, not desiring needlessly to frighten his already trembling companion, the young man hurried forward, without communicating to her his discovery. Reaching the entrance to the palace, Maxtha bade her good night, promising to see her again in the following evening. He then passed off across the park toward his study, little dreaming that he had parted with her for many a day of trial and torture.

As Mazina drew near the doorway, Mezli came running up, and, kissing her hand, requested her company to a short ride in a boat. It was early in the evening, and Mazina consented.

Mezli was expert with the oar, and loved to be on the water, while Maxtha, having often accompanied her on similar expeditions, had no fears. They were soon gliding slowly down the canal, through the park, toward the wider channel which led into the open lake.

Mezli appeared in high spirits. Mazina was so amused that she forgot herself, and before she was aware of it they had passed from the channel, out upon the smooth waters of Tezeno.

At that moment, another boat, bearing three men, was discovered pursuing them. Mazina became frightened, and urged immediate

return, yet this might prove difficult, unless they could elude their pursuers.

Mezli appeared troubled, and paled with all her might, yet kept the course of the boat directly toward the western coast of the lake.

On, on they went swiftly over the water. The chase became exciting. Mazina trembled, and was fearfully alarmed, Mezli appeared to exert every muscle to outstrip her pursuers.

Ere long the boat shot high and dry upon the bank, when Mezli, catching Mazina by the hand, assisted her from the boat. Together they fled across the field. It was all to no purpose. They were speedily overtaken by their pursuers, and roughly seized. Resistance was useless; and Mazina, more dead than alive, was unchained, and her arms pinioned. Mezli was too easily captured, yet she was eventually subdued, when they were conducted on across the fields, in a westerly direction.

"Oh, for the presence of Maxtha! How the soul of the imprisoned girl cried out for his protecting arm as the ruffians bore her — she knew not whither.

"Maxtha! Maxtha!"

He, too, would mourn for himself as well as his lost love.

At the appointed hour, Maxtha, unconscious of the misfortune that had befallen Mazina, started to fulfill his engagement with Cruzilli.

Reaching Cruzilli's residence, the sculptor was received with great cordiality, and was at once conducted to that portion of the edifice where the proposed work was to be executed. In a spacious apartment was a column of polished porphyry, standing in the center of the room. Cruzilli represented that it had served an instant to rest upon this, and that it was to be an eagle with spread wings, chiseled from a solid block of jasper. Maxtha stepped forward to examine the block. Quick as thought, like the breaking of glass, the floor parted from under his feet, and down, down into the abyss of darkness, the sculptor passed. The floor closed with a significant crash above him, and all was silent as the porphyry pillar, which seemed to stand as a sentinel over that fatal trap.

A feeling of dread and terror was followed by a quick swooning spell, when the victim became insensible. How long he lay in that state, he could not determine. His first impressions of time were a sense of coldness, and a benumbed sensation of his limbs. He next felt the floor where he lay to be wet and slushy; and, with some difficulty, he succeeded in raising himself to a sitting posture.

At first he imagined himself to be blinded by a bludgeon across the eyes. The impression was caused by a severe collision with his head, occasioned by the fall and the impetuous blow with which he was surrounded, and in which it was impossible even to clasp over his own hand. A heavy vapor, like a heavy mist filled the dungeon; and which protracted a most dismal scene.

Quick upon the consciousness of these horrors came past incidents, and it did not require any deliberation to understand that he was

A prisoner — shut away, probably, where his eyes never again would behold the blushing rays of the sun. His buoyancy was gone; the thought of it caused a shudder to pass through his frame. Still he was not a man to submit easily. In the midst of the most appalling danger his courage did not forsake him. He looked upon his situation as the triumph of enemies, whom he would kill, if possible. He sprang to his feet and gazed afar until, yet without detecting a single object, so impenetrable was the darkness. Sliding his foot along on the slippery floor, he moved cautiously forward, for the purpose of finding the wall, and by sense of feeling, to determine the dimensions of his surroundings.

His outstretched hand soon reached the wall, which, like the floor, was cold and covered with a slimy substance — the accumulation of long years. He then proceeded carefully onward tracing his course with his hands, until he had passed entirely around the dungeon. As near as he could determine, the cell was about twelve feet square, but the height he was unable to ascertain.

For a moment he paused, and his mind was weighed down with its realization of his red condition. He thought of Mazina, who, he fore saw would forever be ignorant of his fate. He thought of his darling project — the moment for his emperor, through which he hoped to secure the imperial favor.

"This — this!" he exclaimed, in the bitter anguish of his soul, "This is the end of us! This is the end of all my cherished hopes! This is the closing scene of a life only a few hours ago so full of promise!"

That instant he detected, at the opposite side of the dungeon, what appeared to him to be two glaring eyes, and, for a moment, he gazed steadily upon them. They assumed, in his frenzied state of mind, a wonderful magnitude, and continued to increase in size; yet, undismayed, he moved quietly forward, when his foot struck something, and he fell prostrate, falling at full length on the filthy floor.

The fall was a most offensive odor, and for a short time, he was obliged to hold his breath, to prevent strangu lation. Soon, however, the musкус emanation had partially subsided, and he commenced an exclamation by flinging with his hands.

"O heavens! it was a human body, and, as his hand passed over the frame, he felt the flesh drip and slippery. In many places the bones protruded, indicating that the mass was fast decaying back to earth. Was he to pass away from life in such company? What fiend come upon us in human shape, to people such places with the dead?"

CHAPTER VI.

MONTZUMA'S PALACE.

WHAT a stupendous monument to the art, taste, and skill of the Aztec! A fit Pantheon for these Greeks of the New World!

Alas that it should be their Mausoleum!

It was built of the red porous stone of the country, called *tlatzontli*, with ornaments of jasper and porphyry. On the facade, over the principal entrance, was sculptured the arms, or device, of Montezuma, which consisted of an eagle, holding in his talons an serpent. In the courts were fountains of crystal water, fed from the cistern reservoir on the distant hill of Chalchihuitl, and, in turn they supplied over a thousand baths, through the interior of the palace.

Crowds of Aztec nobles were scurrying about the park and in the outer halls, lolling away their time in idleness upon the court.

The apartments of the Imperial residence were of immense size, though the ceilings were low, and were composed of eliotanus wood ingeniously paneled. The floors were covered with mats of palm-leaf, highly colored. The walls were hung with cotton, richly stained, and with gorgeous draperies of feather-work, wrought in the most glowing shades. Clouds of incense constantly descended in showers of pure gold, and diffused intoxicating odors throughout the grand apartments.

Hundreds of vassals thronged the place, for the funeral had in the most sumptuous style.

On all public occasions he was strict in his apparel. When approached by inferior officers, or subjects of lower grade, they invariably took off their sandals, and if led to him in state, they threw over their ornaments a mantle of *tehuacan*—a cloak still to be found in the fibers of maguey, and worn only by the lowest class. Thus, barefooted, with downcast eyes, and formal deportment, they entered into the august presence of their sovereign; yet, in private, and to his immediate associates, he was bold and gay-spirited.

Three days subsequent to the disappearance of Mexico, the emperor sat in a private saloon. With him was Lord Alvarado. The slaves had been dismissed. It was about the hour of four in the afternoon.

Montezuma was wrapped in an ample cloak of the finest cotton, beautifully embroidered, and his feet were covered in sandals of soft

leather, all of which were beaded with pearls, precious stones, and glittering with gold. His hair was black and straight, his beard thin, and his countenance paler than usual among his copper-colored race. In stature he was tall, slender, and well formed. He was, at that time, about forty years of age.

"Then you can find no trace of him?" he asked, continuing a previous conversation.

"Nothing, my lord, except what I have related;" replied the old nobleman.

"The movement appears to have been against both Mazina and Meztli; as I understand it?"

"Yes, Meztli was taken away with her, but the boat in which they were, was returned to the palace the same night."

"You think the abduction was effected through the agency of Mixtli, do you?" and the monarch looked steadily into the face of the old noble. "What reason have you for arriving at this conclusion?"

This was a somewhat difficult question to answer, yet, after a moment's delay, Lord Abuitzol replied:

"For a long time I have noticed an undue intimacy existing between this sculptor and Mazina, and I have taken extra pains to express my disapproval of the course, on the ground of my son's prior claim. I think that they became discouraged of ultimate success, and he enticed her to leave the palace."

Montezuma did not reply immediately; he appeared to be in deep study. Finally he rallied, and remarked:

"I will summon the sculptor, and enter into a speedy examination."

"I shall be grateful for your assistance in this, my hour of visitation, most noble sovereign;" continued Lord Abuitzol, with apparent feeling. "Their recovery will restore to me a dutiful daughter and a faithful slave. My son is incomparable at his loss. He mourns deeply over the misfortune that has snatched from him his fair Mazina."

Lord Abuitzol took his leave of the imperial palace, and Montezuma commenced pacing impatiently — to and fro.

"Yes! Yes! I will inquire into this affair!" and there was a significant expression upon his face as he spoke.

While the monarch was still pacing along the apartment, the strange priest entered, without knock. This was no unaccustomed occurrence. Montezuma had been a priest previous to his ascending the throne, and, it is said, that when his election was announced to him he was found by the courier sweeping down the stairs in the great temple. Thus, it may be supposed, that a familiarity would be established between him and the priesthood, which would be rigidly maintained with other subjects.

"Ah! a! a! priest!" exclaimed the emperor; "am glad that you have come. Unveil your self."

"My lord has but to command," replied the priest reverently.
"I would have you seek Maxthi Ytzcatl, the sculptor, and bid him hasten to my presence."

"My good lord," interrupted the priest; "it was of him I came to speak. He is missing, and there is suspicion of foul play against his life. I fear that the young man has been murdered."

"Murdered!" He started at the word, and then related to the priest the substance of his interview with Lord Ahauitztl. The priest listened attentively, and, in return, gave the monarch a partial account of his proceedings at and about the old noble's palace, during the past few days. He had haunted the place like a specter—far, was not Mazinc's safety dearer to him than life?"

"I will accompany you to the sculptor's studio," exclaimed the emperor, after a moment's silence; "and I will inquire into the particulars of this affair."

Soon the royal palanquin, blazing with burnished gold, emerged from the imperial court-yard, borne up on the shoulders of four nobles. Over it was a canopy of gayly feathered, jeweled with jewels, and fringed with silver. In front of the royal chariot marched two aged officers of state, preceded by the strange priest in his sable robe and mask; while, on either side, and in the rear, were a crowd of young nobles who acted as a body-guard for the emperor.

Reaching the studio, the monarch descended from the litter, walked into the workshop, and his eyes swept around the apartment with a searching scrutiny. He then passed out the rear room, looking upon the arms of the two officers, and accosted by the priest.

The old nobles uttered an exclamation of surprise, on beholding the wonderful likeness of their emperor, chiseled from a solid block of porphyry. They were lost in the expression of admiration of the remarkable powers of the sculptor.

Montezuma watched the movement and expression of his attendants with a curious smile, and when they had been satisfied with examining the monument, he ordered that it should be carefully removed to his palace. The royal retinue then turned and entered the court-yard, amid the prostrate forms of the populace that had crowded around the procession.

The monarch soon issued a proclamation, which was published by heralds throughout the entire capital. The royal edict declared that Maxthi Ytzcatl had mysteriously disappeared, and under peculiar circumstances. Life, liberty, and power, would be the reward of any person, or persons, who would give information where the sculptor could be found, or that would lead to a detection of his abductors or assassins.

"Life, liberty, and power!" went forth for the ear of the slave community, who knew of these things only from their enemies by those who were his masters!

While the heralds were passing through the capital, crying the

royal proclamation, Lord Ahuitzol was walking to and fro on the eastern corridor of his palace. His arms were folded, his gaze downcast, and his step firm and elastic. There was a lowering expression on his features, a close knit of the eye-brows, and a haughty grin upon his lips, as he moved forward and back among the clustering vines and thick foliage clambering about the corridor.

"Fool that I was," he muttered; "not to have foreseen this event; yet I will find her, if I have to scour every inch of the country, from coast to coast. I will offer great reward—I will have spys in every part of the nation. I will find her, and she shall marry Tolucia. I will fulfill my oath, though it cost me my entire estate—yea, even my life; yet, any movement of compulsion, if necessary to accomplish my object, must be concealed from the emperor. He need not know my designs. I will caution Tolucia. He must be on his guard. This strange priest, I cannot understand him. He appears always near, and I believe he is banished with that sculptor; yet all the information he gets will do him no good. Hark! what is that?" and he listened. It was the royal heralds, and his ear caught the words. They sent a thrill of satisfaction to his heart, and he became elated, even expressed his delight in a moderate laugh; well for his spirit of pride and spite that he did not comprehend the full import of the proclamation!

At that moment he was startled by the sound of footsteps. Looking up he beheld Mezli, her robe displaced, her hair disheveled, her features haggard and an expression of the deepest anguish on her countenance, as she came quickly forward, and fell prostrate before the old noble, weeping aloud.

Lord Ahuitzol was quite taken by surprise, but immediately recovered, and, stepping, assisted her to arise. She obeyed hesitatingly, and continued to weep, refusing to be comforted.

"Oh Mazina! Mazina! Where is she?" exclaimed the sorrowing girl, her face deluged with tears. "Has she returned?"

"No, Mezli," replied the noble; "she has not returned. Do you know where she is?"

"Me!" and she broke forth with renewed grief. "Oh, they bore her away from me, and took her to the mountains."

"Who did?" he questioned quickly.

"Alas! I do not know," and she continued to sob.

"Compose yourself, Mezli, and tell me all that occurred to you and Mazina after you left the park in that large?"

With considerable effort, Mezli related such incidents as the reader is already acquainted with, when she continued:

"We were both frightened, and so nigh as to prevent our escape from each other. Then, they immediately separated us, and took me one way, while they conducted her another. I was taken to a deep cave in the mountains, and there kept until this morning, when I managed to escape, and came directly to the palace; yet I did not expect to find Mazina here, for I believe that she was taken away by those who intended to keep her safe."

Lord Ahuitzotl immediately entered the palace. As he disappeared Meztli's grief suddenly changed to a wicked, triumphant smile; her lip curled contemptuously, and she cast a snatching glance either way along the corridor.

"Thus far," she remarked, "I have succeeded, and my prospects are flattering. Mazimí is safely disposed for the present, and now for further conquests. Ha! ha! ha!" she laughed scornfully; "they do not tamper with me, *I am a slave*—so he said, yet I have a mind to plan, a will to execute, with heart for revenge. I will bring that villain—Tobia, to my feet. He shall plead earnestly for mercy. What sound is that?" and she listened.

It was the royal heralds, and her ear caught every word.

"Life—LIBERTY, and POWER! to the informant!"

She glided from the corridor, descended to the park, and crept cautiously away from the palace, unobserved as that she had left a dark figure, crouched on the roof, directly above where she had been standing.

She passed from the park and hurried forward with all possible speed. Ere long, she stood in the royal ante-chamber, awaiting an audience with Montezuma.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SECRET CHAMBER OF THE TECOCALLI.

The lake of Texcoco, at that time, presented as one of grandeur seldom equalled. Its clear, placid water was interspersed with floating islands, laden with flowers, shrubs, and vegetation. These garlands originally were constructed of reeds, rushes, and other materials, knit or woven tightly together, until they formed a mass sufficient to support the sediment which the waves now deposited on the bottom of the lake. Gaudily islands were thus formed, sometimes two or three hundred feet long, and, perhaps, one hundred wide, with a soil three or four feet deep. On these floating banks the Aztecs raised vegetable's and flowers for the great markets of Tenochtitlán—the capital was then called.

Some of these islands were strong enough to support a hut in which a person, having charge of the island, lived, and with a long pole, he could change the position of his little territory at pleasure.

Appearing one of these larger banks on the afternoon, and about the same hour that Meztli entered Lord Ahuitzotl's palace from her reported captivity, was a lighted candle in front. Tobia.

Upon reaching the side of the island, he sprang ashore, secured his

Loit to a bush, and passed off toward a frail tenement, made of reeds and rushes.

In the entrance of this hut sat a woman, some forty years of age, whose singular appearance will induce us to pause for a word of explanation.

Her dark complexion appeared induced more from exposure to the scorching rays of a hot sun than from any tinge of blood. Her eyes were large, lustrous, and bright, and seemed not to have lost any of their youthful brilliancy. Her features were slightly wrinkled, yet bore marks of early comeliness. Her hair was black, long, and silky, through which were mixed a few scattering locks of white, and hung in loose, heavy masses upon her shoulders. Her brow was artfully surmounted with a wreath of gay, sweet-scented flowers, and her robe was both picturesque and singular. It consisted of fine cotton, wrought with strange devices of birds, serpents, and insects, and beaded with feathers, pearls, precious stones, and gold.

The garment reached from her neck to her feet, and was held at mid waist by a belt of curious workmanship. Her arms were bare to the shoulders, colored with the juice of berries, and ornamented with bracelets of pearls and feathers. Her feet were incased in beautifully embroidered sandals, and in her hand was a long slender wand, wound with wreaths of flowers.

She was called Tenatuh — the child of the sun. This sobriquet was given her on account of her miraculous power in telling future events. In short, she was a prophetess of great celebrity among the natives.

With her magic wand she professed to raise the dark pall, and look back into the most secret recesses of the past, or to lift the thick cloud that obscures the future, and reveal from the great book of destiny events yet to transpire.

"Ah! ye! I Tenatuh!" exclaimed the young noble; "I am glad to see you."

She arose to her feet as he spoke, leaned lightly upon her wand, and looked steadily into his face. Then slowly raised the magic stick, laid it down upon his head, and replied:

"The stars have spoken. They wouldst know of the past, and the future?"

"That was the object of my visit;" he answered, with a smile at her odd compliment.

She did not attempt to notice the expression, but with her head bowed forward, and her gaze fixed on the ground, she continued:

"I will speak as the stars move. Years ago lived a noble. He was great and valiant. He had a wife and son. The wife was meek and loving. The son was bold and valiant, with a heart of steel. His mother was the wife — the bright star of the palace, died. The noble died, and left a widow. He had many, but I speak of one in particular. She was as the honeycomb, full far as the eye. She showed great preference for him. She, like a artless simplicity, lis-

tened with an open heart to the oily words of the deceiver. She loved him — loved with all her young, innocent heart, led on by his promises and assurances of affection. She believed him and fell into his snare. Her life was forfeited — she saw the fate, which, according to the national custom, awaited her, and she trembled. The hideous gods of the *teocallis* were thirsting for her heart's blood as a common sacrifice — the penalty for her misdeemor. He quailed with horror, for the *gladiatorial sacrifice* would be his punishment, did the emperor learn the facts. In an evil hour he concocted a villainish scheme. He took that young and still-confiding girl, and sank her body in the lake. She was a slave, and but little was thought of her absence, while the son supposing the deed was forever concealed from the eyes of the world, threw off the fear which had made his life accursed, and once again dashed into the gayeties of the imperial court. There was an eye, however, that had watched his movement. When the stone was tied to the weeping, praying victim's neck, and she cast into the water, a person who had also been a victim of the villain, was watching from a place of concealment, and saw the cruel act." While these words were being uttered, Telaca did not appear to breathe. He stood as a statue. His eyes fixed in a glassy stare upon the woman, his teeth set, his lips compressed, and his fingers pressed into the palms of his hands.

She continued :

" For a time, matters moved on smoothly, though he was harboring a serpent in his bosom, which would, ere long, turn and sting him. He found another listening ear in another's love, less artless than the former, and quite his match in the art of revenge. While the seducer led her astray, she wound a coil around his heart till she could lead him at pleasure. By and by he endeavored to cast her off, and to turn his attention to still another victim. This one was also a beloved daughter of the old noble — his father. She, however, had a lover, to whom her heart was plighted. She saw through the churl's mockery of his pretensions, and spurned him from her. He became angry — led his father to support his cause, and, thus armed, he laid violent siege to her heart. The cast-off slave, now restored her power, and the villain trembled. He planned another scheme to trap the slave and the favored lover. The lover was thrown into a dungeon, but the slave and the intended victim clung to the same ring's grasp. Shall I proceed farther? Shall I lift the dark veil from the future, and reveal to you! that yet which is to come?"

" No! No!" he exclaimed wildly, and with a frantic gesture he rushed off toward his boat, and disappeared in it over the water, with a frenzied haste.

It was evening ere Telaca reached the park. Mezli, with a smile and a gay laugh came bounding forward to meet him. His first inclination was to pass without noticing her, but a new thought that instant entered his mind. Leading her to a seat, he questioned her

relative to her captivity. With consummate artifice, she led him through such channels as she thought best, and framed such stories of her miraculous escape as would best suit her own purpose.

Any other than the half-frenzied eyes of Toluca would have read in the Indian's face a smile expression of satisfaction and revenge.

"When the gods would destroy they first make mad."

Toluca was mad!

Let us change the scene.

Upon a high eminence, called the hill of *Otonalpyaco*, in the chain of mountains on the west of the valley, and in full view of the great capital, was the house *teocalli*, surrounded with cutworks of stone, enclosing in its base space.*

The next I was the morning following the last scene between Meztili and Toluca.

In the eastern wall of the inclosure, overlooking the great valley, were two small apertures. These rooms were separated by an arched doorway, across which was suspended a thick curtain of the finest texture and workmanship. It was bedecked with feathers, fringed with gold, and hung with pearls; while precious stones, which formed no small portion of the ornaments, sparkled on the ample folds.

This apartment had a small aperture toward the east, through which the sun's rays penetrated, and during the day, furnished light and air. At night these openings were carefully darkened from within, that any light there would not be discovered from without.

The original purpose for which these apartments were constructed was not known, though it was supposed they were once the rendezvous of a band of robbers. Their existence was, beyond doubt, known only to the persons who then occupied them. The entrance was upon the outside of the inclosure, surrounding the teocalli, and got into from the base of the wall. It was a small cave of peculiar shape, and so finished as to be comfortable for a place of abode.

Here, in this silent recess, two women resided. One was an old lady, who still kept the cave, and who was constantly employed in making embroidery, or rather painting, in which she excelled. The other was Tonantzin, the prophetess, who, in wandering about the city and other places, perusing her mystic calling, always carried with her a quantity of rich articles to dispose of among the nobles, and wealthy families. She owned a small cave, and, while in the immediate vicinity of the city, made her home on the hill above. I will now sketch a brief interview with Toluca.

* This eminence is now indicated by a Christian church, dedicated to St. John the Baptist of Nepantla, which is built upon the ruins of the ancient temple. — The name of the hill is derived from the followers of the saint — the name of the saint being Nepantla; and the name of the hill, Tonantzin, is derived from the name of the goddess Tonantzin, who was worshipped in the neighborhood before the time of the conquest.

No person entering this cave would have supposed, from appearances, that there was a passage leading to any apartments beyond. It was said that strangers called; but, when they did, there was never anything visible to excite suspicion of other rooms and a more luxurious life.

A stone in the floor could be removed. It concealed an opening large enough to admit the passage of a person. Descending down into this, and passing along on a level for a short distance then ascending a long flight of stone steps, you would come to apartments in the wall, those to which we have referred. These secret chambers were furnished in a style at once peculiar and sumptuous. The floors were covered with palm-leaves, the walls hung with draperies of feather-work, and the ceilings beaded with rich hangings.

In one room was a couch, screened by the finest cotton, heavily embroidered, and fringed with golden threads. From the center of either ceiling, hung a curiously wrought basket suspended by a silver cord, and holding a large bouquet of rich-scented flowers; while, scattered around in promiscuous heaps, were rare samples of the old lady's handiwork.

The sun had arisen but a short distance above the eastern mountains, visible far across the great valley, and was pouring its warm light upon the earth. Its rays penetrated into the opening of the cave, and fell partly upon the form of a woman, seated on a low projecting stone, engaged embroidering a large *tilmalli*, or cloak.

This woman was Meztli's mother. She had lived in this cave over twenty years. At the time she was married, her husband, with three associates, lived there, and used the secret chambers for various purposes.

It was there that Meztli was born, and when she was yet an infant, her father and his three colleagues were murdered by a marauding party from a neighboring tribe. This woman and her child were then alone, and, for a few years, she struggled on in great poverty. Finally, she sold her child to Lord Alauitz, who supposed that the child's parents were dead. The mother had never visited the palace, nor had Meztli ever spoken of her as living; though, of late years, they had had frequent intercourse.

The mother was most skillful in embroidery and silk-repairing, a branch of business in which the early Aztecs excelled to a wonderful extent.*

* How singular that such a beautiful art should have been unknown to Cortez at the period of his triumph in the capital city! He sent this work to Spain, where they exhibited great admiration, and were unable to understand the power of the masterly Indian artists in the Old World. Their dyes were obtained from both mineral and vegetable substances, and their cloth was manufactured from cotton raised in the more southern and warmer regions of the country. This garment not only was woven in every degree of fineness required, and, when dressed, the web was colored with

The worker at the desk wore a melancholy countenance. She covered herself about, but even at that instant Tomatish came into her apartment. With a long-drawn breath, the Prophetic threw herself upon a seat, and remarked:

"I have had good luck, Toma. I have sold every article I took away."

The woman looked up with a faint smile, as much as to say she was pleased, though it fatigued her weary task.

"I saw Muzza yesterday morning," Tomatish added; "and she told me that Muzza, Lord Almaz's ward was in the secret chamber."

"She is," replied the woman without looking from her work. "Gipsy and soldier, she is a sweet girl."

Tomatish started forward, and proceeded to descend through the staircase in the tower, for the purpose of ascending to the chambers. Having reached the landing above, she moved the drapery carefully, and entered one of the apartments. Cautiously she stepped forward toward the bed where Muzza lay. Muzza was there and slept. Tomatish raised the curtain from the sleeper's face, and gazed steadily upon her features. One moment she bent over the slumbering form, then started back, dropped the curtain, pressed both hands upon her heart, and gasped for breath. She appeared greatly distressed, graced suddenly, while her lips quivered and her eyes filled with tears.

This emotion lasted but a brief moment. She again raised the curtain which covered the white, clear features of the sleeper, and watched them closely.

"So like her," she whispered. "These features. Oh, how often I have seen them in my dreams! But then, it's always a illusion." That instant she caught a glimmering of the locket, half hidden beneath Muzza's robes. She took it in her hand, gazed at it, then opened it. Her features darkened instantly. The Hall seemed all crowded upon her heart. Her lips were purple, her brain reeled, and she fell upon her knees with the exclamation: "O Merciful Father! I bless thee — I thank thee!"

Tomatish remained kneeling beside the sleeper, the delicate fingers clasped around the neck of the child, and caressed it with reverent tenderness. She did not speak, but only a mournful, melancholy sound escaped her lips. At length she closed the curtains of the next perfect chamber, and left the room. She was followed by the maid-servant, who assisted her in closing the door, and locking it.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GLADIATORIAL SACRIFICE.

In one of the royal saloons were two persons — the emperor, and his nephew, Guatemozin. The young prince, Guatemozin, was about twenty-five years of age, and a great favorite with Montezuma. He was tall, slim, yet well formed; was shrewd, curling, and brave, of good address, and well informed of what was going on through the capital. He was thus of inestimable value to the emperor as a friend, reporter, and counselor. They had been holding a long interview, and one of considerable interest, for Montezuma said:

"Take such assistance as you need, and remove every stone of the building, but find him and bring him to the palace."

"You shall be obeyed, my lord. I will find the sculptor, have no fears;" and the prince arose to depart.

"Stay, Guatemozin!" interrupted the emperor. "What do you think of those white strangers who are approaching the capital?"

"I think they would make good subjects for sacrifices;" and there was a significant smile on his fine features as he spoke.

"Well, hasten on your merciful mission," replied the emperor. "I have called the nobles and counselors to meet at the palace this afternoon, and determine whether we receive them as ambassadors from their great king, or whether we sacrifice them to our gods."

With a formal obeisance the prince left the emperor, passed into the outer court, and was gone.

It had now been four days since Maxtha had been plunged into the horrors of that filthy dungeon, suffering all the agonies of thirst and hunger, and compelled to inhale the noxious and revolting effluvia of its portal of death. He had made every exertion in his power to effect an escape — as well might the tenant of the last miles pit have hoped for release!

There was no means of deciding the length of time that he had been in the dungeon. It appeared an age of agonizing hours. Weak, exhausted, and disengaged, he crawled to the center, crouched in a sitting posture, braced up by the walls, and there endeavored to become composed and reconciled to his fate.

If he could but have seen Mazina — if he could have pressed her to his heart, in a long, last farewell, he would have been more resigned. Even in his distress his soul languished for her, and her name trembled upon his lips like a prayer.

"Maxtla! Maxtla Ytzcoatl!"

Was it a voice from the gods? Had Heaven opened to let in that gleam of light?

"Maxtla!"

He heard the call with the surprise that the earth must have felt when the day came out of the darkness. Yet he did not respond. He exerted every nerve, yet could not pronounce a single syllable! The perspiration stood thick upon his brow. He attempted to rise to his feet, but the muscles were powerless. Paralysis had taken hold upon his limbs.

"Maxtla! Maxtla!"

Oh, the horror! the agony of that moment! Would they close down the door, and leave him to die? or would they venture in to search?

Tears, the first that he had shed for many a day, gushed up from his heart, and rolled silently down his cheeks. In the hour of trial he saw his friend. Death did not daunt him; but now that succor was near, yet might pass and leave him still in the same dungeon, was a thought too fearful for even his resolution.

Ah! his heart relents. A torch and a man are descending by a rope. The cry goes is blazed by the, to him, dazzling brilliancy of the dim light. His redemption had come! He heard a shout, wild and prolonged. A cold tremor passed over his heart, and he remained silent no more.

Maxtla was drawn up apparently lifeless. Cruzilli stood near, and looked calmly up in the scene. Six of Monteruzia's trusty generals, and Prince Gantzin-zin, stood over that horrible pit, while, surrounding the unwilling, were a thousand of the guard, awaiting the command of their leaders.

One word from Gantzin-zin and the house would have been razed to the ground, yet he did not give the wished-for order. His hate was too great for any such vengeance, and Cruzilli was silently bound in strips of cords for a torture his crime merited.

Maxtla was borne to a couch in a perfectly apartment of the imperial palace. A hundred of the most skillful physicians in the capital were summoned to his side, by command of the emperor. How low his lamp of life flickered in its socket, even these wise men did not guess.

Monteruzia sat in a great audience saloon, surrounded by a number of his nobles and counselors. Before him stood Cruzilli, awaiting his sentence. The master knew that he had nothing to hope for, and had firmly resolved to die without flinching.

The emperor cast with interest to the state coat of Prince Gantzin-zin; and when he had a look, the monarch ordered the chief physician to the Thessalians, that there should be a sacrifice made to Gantzin-zin, to prop up the soul which the fiend had snatched. A hand was set up Cruzilli's frames as he turned up, and with a firm step, walked deliberately from the saloon under a strong guard.

The imperial mandate went forth, and in an hour's time a multitude had gathered upon the summit of the *Tescalli*. About eight feet from the wall, within the area of the great temple was a circular mass, perhaps three feet thick, resembling a huge millstone. To this stone Cruzilli was led by two priests, stripped to his waist, his head decorated with feathers, and his face painted with hideous devices. He was then placed upon the stone, bound to it by one foot, and armed with a heavy *mazatlan* and shield.

In this position, and thus accoutered, he was compelled to battle against the attack of a soldier or officer, who was better prepared for the deadly encounter. If he should be overcome, he would be immediately conveyed to the altar of Common Sacrifice, and there butchered in a revolting manner. If he was not overcome, but successfully defeated seven consecutive contestants, he was then allowed to go free. Such was the law of the Gladiatorial Sacrifice.

As Cruzilli gazed upon the crowd gathering around him, his eye fell upon the features of Toluan. A smile passed over his countenance as of tumult as his grasp tightened upon the hilt of his weapon.

That moment an opponent stepped forward. His attire sparkled with jewels, and his weapons were of the most formidable kind. Cruzilli eyed him closely, apparently measuring the strength of his assailant, then quickly threw himself into an attitude of defense. It was plainly evident that he did not intend to be easily overcome, and it was very apparent that he was no novice in the use of the weapon which he held.

The officer struck the first blow. Cruzilli parried it off with his shield, and brought down his own ponderous mace upon it upon his adversary's head with such force as to cleave open the skull.

A wild shout went up from the assembly, when the writhing victim was dragged away, and another sprang eagerly forward; but it was impossible to stand before Cruzilli's awful blows.

One after the other of his opponents fell in rapid succession, until the seventh and most formidable adversary stood before him. Again his flashing eye swept over the assembly, and again that contemptuous smile passed over his countenance. The struggle lasted but a instant. Cruzilli's weapon descended with such crushing force as to break under his antagonist's shield, and scatter his brains upon the frail armor.

There went forth another prolonged shout, when the prisoner was released and borne in triumph from the *Tescalli*, upon the shoulders of the populace, who appeared equally satisfied with the slaying of seven, as if the one had been everyone, and his heart torn from his bosom beat to feel the insatiate gods.

CHAPTER IX.

FATHER AND SON.

While these events were being enacted up on the *teocalli*, Montezuma was busy in his palace. He was sorely troubled, not only with the domestic affairs of his government, but there was a powerful and a mysterious enemy marching steadily onward toward his capital, whose coming filled his heart with undefined terrors. Yet he maintained his outward composure, and dispatched a courier for Lord Almiztli and his slave Meztili. They immediately answered the royal summons, when the emperor, in consideration of services rendered by Meztili, who gave information where the sculptor could be found, rewarded her with freedom, and made her a privileged inmate of the imperial palace.

Lord Almiztli was then severely censured for his complicity in the intrigue, and summarily dismissed from the council halls. Toluea was condemned, and an order issued for his arrest.

These matters settled, their attention was turned to the all-absorbing interest of the period. The remainder of the day was devoted to discussing the course which they, as a great and mighty nation, ought to pursue toward the audacious strangers.

Montezuma was for peace. He favored the receiving of the heralded strangers as embassadors from the great king whom they represented. Prince Geronazin bitterly opposed this course. He endeavored to convince the emperor that evil would come of the concession, and urged that they stand up manfully and defend their homes and their temples from the pollution of strangers. The fiery and impetuous Geronazin demanded that his sovereign should depute him to remove the presumptuous invaders from the land, placing his life, if thus empowered, to exterminate them in a week; but the emperor ruled, and preparations were made to receive the Spaniards into the capital on the following day.

At this time — November 7th, 1519 — the immortal Cortez and his little band of followers had gradually advanced from the coast, and now neared the city of Iztapalapan, situated in full view of the great Aztec capital.

What thoughts were the followers of that intrepid commander, as he gazed upon the long line of gilded palaces which reflected the rays of the sun, glistening in the dark blue waters of the lake? or

looked around him and beheld the vast, almost innumerable hosts of natives, who, as he had abundant reason to know, regarded him with distrust and aversion?

As daylight failed, an almost impenetrable gloom spread over the scene. The hearts of Castile and Aragon beat wildly with solicitude for the morrow. Their peril never had been greater. The great capital, teeming with a population of hundreds of thousands, lay in quiet repose, apparently secure in its consciousness of superior numbers, and vast strength of fortification.

As the last vestige of light disappeared, the white-haired stranger emerged from the royal court-yard, and passed off toward Lord Ahuitzotl's palace, to which place let us precede him by a few hours.

As Lord Ahuitzotl, who, for so long a period had been one of Montezuma's most intimate friends, returned this time from the presence of his emperor, where he had been publicly dismissed, it may be supposed that his heart rankled with bitterness. Entering the park, he espied Tolneca just returning from the scene on the *tocalli*. The old noble was so agitated and enraged at what had transpired that he could not speak; but he caught hold of his son's arm with a force that caused him to cringe.

Tolneca in surprise followed his father, who led the way directly to a private apartment, to relate what had taken place at the imperial court.

"It is just what I expected," replied the young man as his father paused. "That priest spy has been playing the eavesdropper, and has overheard our plans."

"Probably!" said the old noble appeared impressed with a new thought.

"I have determined upon my course," pursued Tolneca. "Cruzilli is the leading spirit of a large band who have a stronghold in the mountains, and I intend to accompany him to their secret caves. Then I shall entrap that sculptor, and when he is once in my power, I will see that he does not escape. I shall trace out the hiding-place of Mazina, who, I believe, is concealed by *caveat of the emperor*. When both are in my possession, I will have my own revenge."

"Your plan is good," replied Lord Ahuitzotl. "I will remain in the palace, pretend to be indifferent to the emperor's displeasure, and assist you. When you have secured the game, I shall require your assistance. I do not intend to submit passively to such flagrant indignity; but of that hereafter."

"Yours to command," responded the son, doted with his projects for his revenge; "but, there is one other person who stands in my way. I must have Mecalli—she and I have a long account to settle, and these last three days will be my opportunity."

"When do you go?" inquired the old man.

"Cruzilli will meet me in the park immediately after dark, when we

"I must fly from the city, as it would be dangerous for him to be caught in the streets unless disguised. It was almost impossible to keep the西班牙人 from turning him to pieces as he was brought back from the *teocalli*; and, but for the emperor's guards, he would have been butchered."

With the eyes, raised, imploring Mezli arose from her knees. With her hand raised to the door, and her ear close to the crevices through which the talk of the room where they were, she had listened to every word they had uttered. Nor was she the only listener. But mysterious priest had not been asleep, nor careless of the emperor's secret; for, as the treason-plotters ceased their conference, he slipped carefully away from beneath a window of the apartment, and hastened across the park, in the direction of the great *teocalli*.

Telma was busy until evening collecting and arranging such articles as he desired to take with him into the mountain fastness. As nightfall came, he walked forth into the park to meet Cruzilli. Reaching the appointed place, he commenced pacing to and fro upon the edge of a canal until Cruzilli appeared; when the twain entered the previously provided boat, and moved rapidly off toward the lake. As they passed from the park into the main channel, that mysterious stranger, with the white hair, was standing, where he had watched them closely as they sailed within five feet of his place of concealment.

CHAPTER X.

THE SPANIARDS' ENTRY INTO THE CAPITAL.

As the first break of day became visible in the east, the Spanish General was astir, mustering his followers, who gathered around him with blazing hearts. The sound of martial music awakened strange echoes through the valley and off among the mountains,—such as the natives had never before heard. The effect was wonderful, and the Indians shrank it with superstitious awe.

For hours across the lake, through the gray mist of morning, could be seen the several fires, ever burning upon the *teocallis*. Gradually the light increased, until temple, tower, and palace were fully revealed in the glorious illumination of the morning sun as it overtopped the distant mountains and girded over the beautiful valley a band of fire.

The General, Cruzilli planned his course from the east with a series of brilliant triumphs, such as had never before been recorded in the history of the world. A little handful of Spaniards,

surrounded by myriad hosts, often threatened with entire annihilation, had marched on undaunted, unappalled, until now they gazed upon the capital of whose splendor they had been told. Though less than four hundred Spaniards, they marched forward. They beheld on either side, indications of wealth, power, and civilization. Although they had looked upon imposing scenery along their course, yet that encompassing the great capital was indescribably magnificent.

Entering on the southern dike (which was an immense construction of huge stones bed in cement, and wide enough for ten horsemen to ride abreast), they discovered that the lake was absolutely darkened by swarms of canoes, filled with Indians, who climbed up the side of the causeway, and gazed upon the strangers with curious astonishment.

At the distance of half a league from the capital, was a solid wall across the causeway, called Fort Xochic. Here the Spaniards were met by a large number of Aztec caciques, who had come out to announce the approach of the emperor and to welcome the white men to the capital.

After the usual ceremonies were concluded, the Spaniards followed their conductors toward the city; and, as they crossed a drawbridge, over an opening in the dike, they felt how truly they had committed themselves to the mercy of Montezuma, who, by destroying the bridges, could cut off their retreat.

Fears were not absent from their breasts when they beheld the glittering retinue of the emperor emerge from the great street which led through the heart of the capital. The monarch was borne in a palanquin of burnished gold, raised upon the shoulders of nobles, and shaded by a canopy of gorgeous feather-work, studded with pendant drops of silver and shells.

When the train neared the Spaniards, it halted, and Montezuma descended from the litter, assisted by the lords of Texcoco and Iztapalapan. As the monarch advanced, under a canopy held over him by young nobles, the obsequious attendants spread a cotton tapestry on the ground that the Imperial feet might not come in contact with the rude earth. His subjects, who lined either side of the causeway, bowed with humble reverence as he passed, — shivering, by their attitude, the great respect which they entertained for their sovereign.

Montezuma was habited in a square *tunic*, or cloak, made of the finest cotton. His feet were case in sandals, having soles of pure gold, while both the cloak and sandals were ornamented with feathers, pearls, and precious stones. On his head, held by a golden band of superb workmanship, was a *parache* of plumes of royal green, which waved gracefully over his shoulders. He was otherwise adorned with the greatest magnificence; and, as he moved about, the rays of the sun were reflected in ten thousand transparent brilliancies. His demeanor and bearing were courteous and considerate,

ing; and the meeting between him and Cortez was one of deep interest. At the close of the interview, however, the Indian monarch appointed his brother to escort the illustrious strangers to the quarters prepared for them in the capital.

The emperor then received the letter and was borne away amid the prostrate forms of the populace, while Cortez resumed his march, and entered the city. Passing along its spacious streets, his wary eyes scanned the moving mass of Indians who thronged every unexpected spot around the Spaniards; and well nigh he trembled, when he reflected, that did these natives but so determine, they could overpower him in an hour, and not have one soul to relate the bold-harly adventure.

The Indians had marched boldly into the heart of the great city, following their conductor. Finally they reached the old palace of Axayacatl, Montezuma's father, who built it fifty years before. The castle was low, but commodious, and the apartments were of immense size, affording ample accommodations for the entire army. The court was surrounded by a formidable wall, in which the Spaniards found apparent security; yet the ever-watchful Cortez, planted his cannon, stationed his sentinels, and enforced the most strict discipline among his troops. After this disposition of his forces, the Spanish general was seated alone in a spacious room. He had been engaged writing a minute account of his entrance into the Aztec capital, but from moment he had remained with his forces, leaning against the edge of the table, apparently in deep meditation.

Suddenly he became aware of a light noise on the floor. Looking up he beheld a short, thick-set man, completely enveloped in black cloth. In his hands were small round spears, through which could be discerned bright, keen-edged eyes. The man gazed curiously around him, and advanced into the apartment. Cortez was naturally excited at the sight. He sprang suddenly on the table by the side of his writer, yet the man made no effort to reach them. His gaze was fixed steadily upon his singular visitor.

The man uttered the strange and dreary words, "Jesus, my gall-cross, with further trouble," and held it up before the general's face. The Spaniard could first see the cross, then upon the person who held it. The stranger unclasped the features of the general with a slow smile. He then replied, "The cross in his hand, know further, with the end of his last trumpet-blast, presented it to the Spanish, and him. Newly passed from the judgment-throne, is Jesus, who designs a new way, which, until then, was unknown to God and man." As the惊异的 visitor disappeared, Cortez snatched the letter, and read the characters written thereon in his own language. He sprang quickly over the first line, and the spirit of the poet, with a sudden pull, drew forth his letters. The message read as follows:

"My noble sir--You and your little land of countrymen are in the most imminent danger. The people into whose country you

have thus daringly penetrated, are treacherous, cunning, and cruel. They will offer you arms in one hand, and with the other, tear out your hearts to feed their heathen gods. I have watched your progress since you landed on the coast, with an interest of life and death. May the Virgin Mary and the Holy Cross protect you, and crown your efforts with success! Yet, I warn you to be vigilant. You have obtained access to the capital, contrary to the united voice of the populace, and all the leading lords of the realm, who are only held in restraint out of regard to their emperor — Montezuma, whom they have long honored and respected. One false move in you, or your generals, and your army would be overwhelmed by a legion of Aztecs. Then the blood of the Spaniards would flow like a river from the summit of the *bocallis*. Once again I urge you to exert the utmost watchfulness; and may God crown your enterprise with triumph!"

Cortez read this note carefully, two or three times, then folded his arms and commenced pacing to and fro in the apartment. A moment later, he summoned his little page — Ortegailla, and dispatched him to General Alvarado's quarters, with instructions for that officer to wait upon him immediately.

The attendant hurried away, and soon General Alvarado entered the presence of his superior officer. Cortez received him with that familiarity, which ever characterized his conduct toward his colleagues during that eventful campaign; and at once gave him the strange note to read. Following this, was a long, confidential conference, which resulted in a determination to double the sentinels, to enforce the most perfect obedience of the soldiers to their officers, and above all to command that a courteous, respectful demeanor, on every occasion, should be manifested toward the natives. Thus passed the first night of the Spaniards in the Aztec capital.

CHAPTER XI

MAZINA AND THE PROPHETESS.

LET US now to the secret chambers in the wall, on the mountain, surrounding the Indian *bocalli*. The expression of Tonatiuh as she beheld the portrait in the locker, secured around Mazina's neck, awakened the shuddering captive, who sprang up, and gazed with amazement upon the woman kneeling by the side of the bed.

Tonatiuh's long hair, her head-dress of flowers, her rich costume, and, above all, her attitude, for a moment transfixed the attention of Mazina; then the consciousness that she was a captive, in a strange place, rushed upon her mind, and she cried :

"Where, oh, where am I? and why am I thus imprisoned?"

"You—you are with friends, fair lady," the woman answered, rising to her feet; and with a forced calmness continued: "But tell me, where did you get that locket?"

"If I tell you all I know of it, will you inform me why I was brought a captive to this place?"

"I will!" remarked the woman, quickly.

There was a deep earnestness in her tone, which Mazina interpreted favorably, and replied:

"One evening not long since, I walked down into the park surrounding Lord Aluitz's palace, and shortly after sitting down in a bower, I fell asleep. It was probably placed around my neck, while I lay in unconscious, yet by whom, or for what purpose, I can not say."

The woman then sat down on the edge of the bed, gazed searchingly at Mazina's features, and for several moments did not speak. Then rapidly, yet appearing greatly agitated, she exclaimed:

"Answer me carefully a few questions. I am your friend, but there is a heavy load on my heart. The scenes of this morning have awakened old remembrances, which were fast sinking into oblivion of forgetfulness. O God! I have suffered so much. My—my—" her hand dropped upon her hands, tears gushed forth, and she sobbed like a child.

Mazina's heart was touched. This grief at once removed from her all feelings but those of sympathy; and, drawing near she wound her arms around the woman's neck, pillow'd her cheek upon her shoulder, and endeavored to console her with affectionate words.

As Mazina spoke, the fountains of her own heart broke forth, tears deluged her cheeks, and mingled with those of the strange woman.

This was the compact of friendship made between those two, whose fate ever was destined to be closely interwoven.

When Tenatiuh had partially recovered, she took Mazina's hands, laid them gently, yet steadily in her free, and remarked:

"Have you a father and a mother living?"

"Not that I know of," Mazina replied, with a slight tremor.

"Will you tell me how you came to be Lord Aluitz's ward? and what part of the country you came from?"

With the utmost confidence, Mazina proceeded to narrate all the early incidents of her childhood, of which the reader has been reminded. She then, with childlike simplicity continued, and related the particulars of her intimacy with Maxim Ytreoath, and the subsequent separation of Telsa, aided by Lord Aluitz.

During the recital, Tenatiuh listened with interest, and, after having looked her closely upon the mysterious circumstances connected with the locket, to which Mazina could give no satisfactory answer, she said:

"I will now inform you, why you are detained here against your will; but, first, I will give you a short account of my mysterious manner of living. Ten years ago, I came first to this place, having

journeyed from a city far to the southward. I soon became acquainted with Tizoc — the woman who owns or occupies the cave and these secret chambers; and I have since made my home with her.

"My profession is that of prophetess, which I adopted on arriving here, for purposes of my own, knowing that it would allow me the most freedom to go and come without being questioned. I have, therefore, passed considerable time in the city, and have become acquainted with much that is going on in the great capital."

"I was informed by Meztlá, Lord Ahutizel's slave, of the friendship existing between you and the sculptor; and it was she who concocted the plan which effected your present captivity."

"Meztlá, not so much from good will toward you, in thus placing you beyond the reach of those who sought your eternal ruin, as to serve her own purpose of revenge, succeeded in enticing you to accompany her on that evening boat-ride. These men who followed in another bark, were hired to perform the work, and immediately after you was captured, she hurried on in advance to communicate with Tizoc, who is her mother. This woman started out immediately, and had proceeded but a short distance, when she met the men with you. They under took to maneuver, and instantly fled, leaving you with her, when she conducted you to these chambers."

"As matters were at the palace, it was undoubtedly for your interest that the affair occurred as it has; for that villain Teluck, and his father, would have given you much trouble. Here you will be safe; but do not speak one word of what I have told you, for Tizoc is not any too well disposed toward you. I shall go to the city again in a few days, when I will see Maxtlá, and arrange for a meeting between you and him; meanwhile, you must remain perfectly quiet. Trust implicitly in me, and I will effect your ultimate triumph. I must now leave you, but will return again soon. Do not part with that pocket;" and before Maxtlá could make any reply, she was alone.

The morning which broke over the Spanish quarters, following their first night's sojourn in the Aztec capital, was very fair.

At an early hour, Cortez and several of his generals were seated upon a corridor of the palace where their troops were garrisoned, engaged in earnest conversation.

They had been there but a short period, when a woman approached, bearing upon her arm a curious basket, filled with ornaments and jewels, which she presented to them, and made signs to purchase.

This woman we readily recognize by her robe, head-dress, and wand, to be Tizoc, the Prophetess. Cortez took a splendid necklace of pearls, and when he and his officers were about to supersignature it, she was regarding them intently with an earnest gaze.

The article was purchased by Cortez, who paid an intelligent

Priest Chay, and immediately the woman passed off among the crowd and disappeared.

While Teocalli was in the Spanish quarter, Montezuma was seated in a private saloon of his palace. Before him stood Maxtla Yzcal. They appeared to have been, for some time, engaged in conversation, for Montezuma spoke :

"I want you to complete the statue as soon as you can. You will remain in the palace until it is finished, after which, I will make ample provisions for your future. The affairs of my government have been greatly disarranged since the white strangers appeared in the city, and I cannot tell what will become of their entering the city. For the present, I leave the entire management of the incunabula to you, and when the white invaders have returned to their country, I will give my attention to a proper erection of it on the great *Teocalli*."

The sculptor, with an humble obsequience, retired from the presence of his emperor. He was passing through the great hall, however, when Maxtla, who had entered the palace,

"Ah! good mother!" he exclaimed, clutching her familiarly; "I am glad to meet you. Come to my room. I would ask a few questions."

With a word she turned, followed through intricate passages, across open courts, among crowds of nobles and slaves, until they reached Maxtla's apartment.

"I know what you will say," she remarked, setting down her basket and settling herself. "You will know of Marina—Where she is?"

Maxtla started and fixed his eyes upon her earnestly; then suddenly recollecting that she was the royal princess — the fair Isabella of Teocalli, as the Aztecs called her, he replied:

"Yes, good mother, I will know of her. Can you tell me where she is?"

She made a movement, but had stepped forward; then, without regarding her gaze from the floor, she said:

"Marina lives. She is in high spirits, and well-reared. If you will see her, meet me at the tomb of the western dia, this evening, at dusk, and I will conduct you to her."

An exclamation of joy was trembling on Maxtla's lips; his countenance lit up with hope and satisfaction; when a sudden doubt assailed him, and he asked if she meant the period of his banishment, or still not with the soldier. This question was but a trifle, and probably he did not fully understand it, and it was such that he would be pleased to do whatever she bade.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SEIZURE AND THE CAVE PRISON.

As the sun was slowly declining behind the western mountains, Maxtha went forth from the imperial palace, with a light heart and buoyant step. It had been three days since he was removed from the dungeon; in that time, he had recovered much of his wasted strength, yet was suffering from inhaling the noisome effluvia of that living grave.

Reaching the shore on the western border of the lake, it was quite dark. Tenatiuh soon approached, and silently beckoning him to follow, turned and led off toward the west.

Arriving at a convenient spot, in a thick cluster of shrubs, Tenatiuh requested her companion to remain concealed, while she went forward to conduct Mazila from her place of captivity.

Mazila could scarcely wait for the promised return. His joyful heart overflowed. Absorbed in the thought of once again beholding her he loved, that he failed to detect a dark figure crawling on the ground toward the cluster of bushes in which he was concealed.

Seen the anxious lover espied the guide and her charge approaching. He sprang from the bush, bounded eagerly forward, and with a joyous exclamation, pressed to his heart the affectionate Mazila. "Maxtha! O Maxtha!" was her only greeting.

Tenatiuh passed off into the darkness, leaving them alone.

For a few moments the lovers were silent. Then Maxtha heard a soft tread near him, and, on looking around, he received a blow which laid him prostrate on the earth.

Three leagues west of Tlacopan — a large city, situated at the terminus of the western causeway — was a wild country where mountains, steep precipices, and deep ravines, formed the scene.

Far down in one of these chasms was an opening, that led to subterranean chambers into which we must transport the reader.

The passage was small, and, to pass in, it was necessary to stoop slightly; but, having proceeded a few feet, the aperture was much larger, its craggy outlines, barely discernible in the darkness, being illuminated only by rays of sunlight which penetrated the gloom.

mouth of the cavity. The course was smooth, nearly level; and, after having advanced, perhaps fifty feet, opened into a cave of immense magnitude.

The scene was drear and in full darkness, and the fall of a footstep, or the fall of a voice, echoed along the high vault with deep, mournful hollow sounds. There was, apparently, no passage leading from this cave. Even had the dark, damp cavern been lit up with the light of noonday, no aperture would have been discovered; nor would the place have indicated that it was ever visited by human beings. The floor was covered with debris of rocks, and the walls presented a spectral yet picturesque appearance. Yet, upon approaching a certain place, and rapping twice upon what appeared to be a large stone, weighed in the wall, it rolled noiselessly back, and a faint light was discernible in the opening beyond.

Just within was a sentinel, who with his companions kept constant guard over the entrance. Having passed through this opening, the stone rolled back by the sentinel, and then secured in a manner that would have resisted any force from without. Nothing short of passing the stone to pieces would have moved it from its solid fastnesses.

Having passed this formidable barrier, and traversed a circuitous route some thirty or forty feet farther, we reach another cave of nearly the same size as the former, though furnished in a manner more like some gilded apartment of the emperor's palace, than a den made in all probability of cutlows.

There was no article of comfort or ornament enjoyed by any of the Aztec nobility, that was not to be found in this cavern. It was illuminated with a soft pleasant light, and the atmosphere was laden with delicious perfume.

From this cave were several passages, leading off in different directions, and communicating with other apartments; while one, which we will follow, led over an intricate course of rough, loose stones, and through a narrow crevice, down, for at least two hundred feet, where, by turning an abrupt corner, we are ushered into a subterranean hall, lighted, and in which a sentinel guarded the passage leading to that through which we first entered.

Having passed this, we continue our distance farther, when we emerge upon a fertile valley, thickly overgrown with tall fruit trees, and flowers.

Early in the morning, and owing to the interruption of the intervening hills—Marta and Medina, voices were heard near the mountain side. Soon Chacal and Pagan appeared in sight, and were followed by Chacal and Medina. The arms of the couple were loaded with fruit, and they marched in front, as usually the case in their excursions. As they passed into the city, it could be seen that Chacal was smiling, and Pagan forward, and soon stopped by the roadside. It was Medina. Her keen eyes had been well turned to the guard, and with the evident intention of breaking the

ciality. Then turning, she moved rapidly away, passed over the cliff and disappeared.

Rushing the scorpion is a creature of which we have spoken, Mazina was released by her captors. Overcome with flight and exhaustion, she sank helpless to the floor.

Maxta's heart bled in pity for her sufferings. That moment his own hands were released, preparatory to having them once more bound. With the rapidity of lightning, he slid from the grasp of his captors, and the next instant Cruzilli lay sprawling at full length on the floor, followed by Toluna, both having received blows that would have felled an ox. Then, stooping, Maxta raised the frightened Mazina, and clasped her to his heart.

The two villains were soon on their feet again, and with fierce, menacing gestures, they advanced to the assault. Maxta placing Mazina behind him retreated to the wall, and placed himself in an attitude of defense. His teeth were set, his lips compressed, his eyes flashed, and every nerve was concentrated for a desperate resistance. Toluna was not very strong, nor very courageous, and he purposely avoided coming within reach of the sculptor's arms. Cruzilli was more than Maxta's equal in strength, yet set his matchless scorpion, and ere he had time to reflect, boldly quivering on the floor it stung the right shoulder of the slave. Then springing forward, Maxta made a lunge at Cruzilli, which started the latter suddenly, and he fell heavily upon the body of Cruzilli, who was just attempting to regain his feet.

As Toluna fled, Maxta discovered a scabbard and unfastened it, hinging against the wall. In an instant he sprang forward, and I threw with a smile of satisfaction, and stationing himself in front of Mazina, determined to defend her to the last. The two fierce villains arose with fiendish sneers, yet they were no way, and did not necessarily expose themselves within the sculptor's reach. They could not understand how the attack, but explained it desire that Cruzilli should subdue the powerful opponent alone. Maxta presented a defiant front, and he held his scabbard to the hilt. Cruzilli had leaped by the tomb, and frenzied by defeat, armed himself with weapons similar to those of the sculptor, and with an air of defiance, he came boldly to the encounter.

Maxta had moved away from the wall, where his cut could have fair play. In a moment their weapons were whizzing in the air. Crash followed crash, in rapid succession. Neither hit. They were equally matched, and the result appeared doubtful. Suddenly, Maxta made a lunge, then struck, yet his scabbard was not covered enough to parry off the blow, but it shivered his scabbard, and laid open one side of his hand, letting the scorpion on the floor. He dropped the point of his scabbard, stepped backward, then fell to the floor covered with blood.

Mazina fainted at the commencement of the struggle, and unconscious of what had transpired. At that moment, however, while

Maxtha's attention was drawn toward the writhing Cruzilli, one of the scoundrels, hearing the sound of battle, came stealthily upon the spot, and, with one fatal blow, struck him senseless.

Then, taking immediate advantage of the movement, sprang forward, and a moment later, the daring and dangerous captive was laid dead at his feet. He was then conducted to a dungeon, where a heavy stone door closed upon him.

Maxtha lay in an unconscious state upon the cold floor.

What if I met him?

Entirely engrossed with thoughts which seemed to absorb every faculty of her brain, she sat down at a distance beyond hearing of others. Her head fell forward upon her hands, and her lips gave utterance to these words:

"There is a mystery about her. She is unlike the rest of the people. Her complexion is so light, her hair so soft and silky, and her every movement so different. That basket! Who gave it to her? Who placed it around her neck? I must find the person! I must know where it was obtained. Hark?" and she listened. Her ear had caught a sound which for an instant startled her; but, failing to repetition, she concluded that it was caused by some straggling person in the vicinity, and without giving it more thought, she gave herself up to her reflections.

In that deep meditation, time passed unheeded. It was some time before she awoke herself from the reverie. Then starting quickly, she hurried back to where she had left Maxtha and Mazza, but they were gone! She called but there was no response. Was it possible that they had taken advantage of her general absence, and fled? The thought chilled her exceedingly.

Little did she dream of what had really taken place!

CHAPTER XIII.

MEZTLI IN A NEW CHARACTER.

THREE OR four hours after the closing of the stone door upon the scoundrel and scouter, a singular person was seated on the bank, just outside the valley-pool of the cave. It was a young woman, apparently eighteen or twenty years of age. Her garments were such as were worn by the lowest class of people— coarse and ill-fitting. Her head was bare, her hair long, tangled, and of a raven black. Her complexion a dark copper color, her eyelids dark, and the expression of her countenance was vacant and listless. She had neither hat upon her head nor shoes upon her feet.

Around her was a large collection of flowers which she had gathered, and from which she was forming a wreath, yet her work exhibited great awkwardness, and a woeful deficiency in taste.

While thus arranging her flowers, Tolera came from the entrance of the cave, bat upon discovering her, started back, and, for several moments, watched her closely. Apparently satisfied with his scrutiny, he walked slowly toward the knoll on which she was seated. She failed to notice him until he had approached within a few feet of her, when, turning her head partly to one side, she eyed him with a bold stare, after which she arose to her feet and commenced gathering up her flowers. This accomplished, she marched off some distance, where she sat down again and began re-arranging the flowers, without even looking back to ascertain whether he was following or not.

Tolera watched her for a few moments, then walked hurriedly up to where she sat and inquired :

"Would you like to work for good pay?"

She did not reply, but gave him another cold, indifferent glance, then continued her work. He was more earnest this time, and remarked :

"If you will go with me, and take care of a young lily, I will pay you well, and you shall be dressed as a waiting-maid of Montezuma's court."

"Where do you want me to go?" she asked, in a sharp, speaking voice, letting her eyes glance over her shabby dress.

"I will show you, if you wish. The fact is, I was just starting out for the purpose of finding such a person as yourself, little dreaming that there was one so near."

"The work is not hard, and you will give me good clothes?" she questioned.

"Yes!"

"I will go and see. If I like, I can stay; if not, I can go away."

"Certainly!" he replied, though his words belie his purpose. "You still have easy work, and good pay."

Thereupon, she gathered up her flowers, and followed Tolera to the entrance of the cave. Here she refused to go any further, asserting that the rocks would fall in and kill her; but, catching himself that a thousand persons lived in the mountain, she concluded to make the trial.

A few moments later, they stood in the apartment where the desperate encounter between Mixteca and Cruzillo took place. Here were forty or fifty men lying around, some timid and some belligerent.

Tolera, however, did not pause, nor did he wait until he had continued directly across the cave, but quickly, taking a long side, and proceeded over a rough course for quite a distance, until, when he entered suddenly into an apartment much smaller than the former, though it suggested it in elegant furniture and hangings,

and was illumined with a bright light. Here on a couch lay Mazina.

"Start! Is thy errand, and exclaimed:

"Oh, tell me! Is Max's deal? Do not keep me in suspense. Where is he?"

Toluca replied indirectly: "I have brought you a person who will assist in whatever you require. She will remain near you for the present, and I hope you will show more judgment for time to come, for you cannot escape me now. As for this sculptor of whom you make so much boast, I may as well tell you one time as another, that his life is forfeit by his own foolishness in opposing our purposes. No power can avert the fate which he has courted. If you are wise, you will exhibit less opposition to my commands, and show more respect for my wishes in time to come."

Mazina groaned in the anguish of her soul.

Four days passed — dismal, relentless days, in which the captive suffered but flaggy. She wept almost incessantly. Weak, distressed, and tormented with the terrible suspense attending the fate of him she loved so well, her condition was deplorable. Toluca had been absent from the eyes much of the time, and she was relieved of his detested presence.

Meanwhile, the simple waiting-maid remained close by the side of her mistress, and had succeeded in obtaining Mazina's confidence. She was kind, affectionate, and obliging, and the poor, persecuted girl found much comfort in the society of her faithful companion; yet the future was dark, drear, and threatening. How was she to escape the storm gathering over her head, which was intended to hurl her to destruction? — to crush her hopes, her life, all in the first. The prospect would have made even a more courageous heart than hers to tremble. Toluca kept a strict watch over her movements when he was present, and when absent he left a substitute.

Mazina's health failed so fast that it was thought advisable for her and her maid to walk out in the open air, in morning and evening. At first Toluca accompanied them, when they were allowed to go alone, yet constantly keeping venturing too far from the opening. Thus, a week passed by, and Mazina's health rapidly improved. Toluca was pleased, and, according to the eat-least exercise, little dreaming in what it would ultimately result.

During all these experiences, the waiting-maid, apparently not more than fourteen, performed her part in the drama in such a way as elicited the approbation of Toluca.

For the night, and Mazina was quite well, or, at least, affected only slightly, the morning as she and her maid had walked some distance from the castle, they discovered a man standing upon a small hill near by.

Mazina recognized him as being the priest, whom she had so often seen in the park, near the castle of Lord Almuzel's palace. With a

smothered cry of joy she sprang forward, her heart swelling with the hope of deliverance. The waiting maid turned and fled with precipitate haste toward the entrance of the caves, passing ere she entered to look back and catch a glimpse of her mistress and the priest, as they passed hurriedly away to the east. An exultant expression lit up her features at the sight, but it vanished ere she reached the sentinel. A moment later she stood in the great cave. Here she listened attentively, and her eyes scanned the apartment with a close scrutiny. She then entered a narrow opening, and immediately stood within a small cavern unbroken in total darkness.

"Maxtha Ytzcoatl!" she exclaimed.

"Has she escaped?" interrogated a voice which we recognized as the sculptor's.

"Yes, she left with a priest whom she appeared to know, and they are now on their way to the capital."

"Was he short? and did he wear a black robe and mask?"

"He did!"

"That is well," replied Maxtha, with apparent relief. "She will have fallen into no better hands. Is the way clear for me?"

"All but the sentinels and Cruzilli. The latter is not yet able to walk, while the others you will have to overcome by stratagem or force; and you must be lively, for Tolucan, with a portion of his followers, will return soon. It is now just about sun-down."

She had cut the ligaments from Maxtha's arms and legs, and directly the captive and rescuer were in the main cave — the scene of the desperate encounter between Maxtha and Cruzilli. He to the sculptor arm'd himself with a *macehualli* and shield, then turned toward the girl and remarked:

"I must thank you ere I go for your bravery and courage in leaving my necessities, even in the face of danger and death. You have saved my life, and the life and honor of one who is dearer to me than my own existence. Without your thoughtful kindness I should now have been so reduced by want of sufficient nourishment as to have been perfectly helpless, perhaps dead. Why you, an entire stranger, should have taken an interest in our welfare, is more than I can say, but, sure it is that you have, and all I can now do is to express my gratitude in words. If you —"

"Come, come!" she interrupted impatiently. "Tolucan and a score of his henchmen will be here before you get away. You can overtake Maxtha and her companion if you hurry. Turn sharp to the left as you enter from the main passage, and keep straight on. It will take you directly to the outlet."

While this conversation was going on, the unresisting man had sat with his head bowed, in silence. In this he was a most singular, silent hawk, with still expression, and, despite all resistance, he was firmly bound.

In five minutes Maxtha had passed the tumultuous barrier, and was standing in the valley opposite the passage, and his eagle eye

sensed the approaching danger with a close examination. The Indian was not slow, but he remembered the directions given by his master, and, without a struggle, followed his instructions. He was soon flying away from the caves, fleeing swiftly as a deer over the mountains.

It had not been more than a few minutes, when the officious girl came to where Tonatiuh stood by, and said:

"Tell me, when he comes, that his victims have flown; and you may ask him if he remembers Mazina? You can tell him also that her revenge is working heavily." Her scorn and dignified step led her to the eyes of the astonished Indian another person than the half-idiot maid.

During all this period Tonatiuh was being tortured with severe trials. With all his energy and creativeness, she could not unravel the mystery which surprised her that night of Maxtha and Mazina, nor could she learn any tidings of them from that evening.

The following day the Indian left the secret chambers, Tonatiuh returned to the castle and found Tizoc, the woman with whom she had fled many ten years, dead! She had been murdered, and the Indian had a full number of every thing worth carrying away; yet the assassin did not discover the secret passage that led to the chambers.

Tonatiuh communicated the sad intelligence to the people of the castle, who had all survived by then the unfortunate woman was buried. They grieved sorely, and, to ascertain, if possible, who were the assassins of the foolish maid.

On the evening of Mazina's escape from the caves, in company with the priest, Tonatiuh sat in the extreme of her now desolate home, the Regencia castle. Her spirit was sadly depressed, and her eyes were moistened with tears.

It was a dark evening. The moon was at its full, and poured a flood of light upon the triple landscape. The night-hawks screeched as they shot rapidly through the air, the insects chirped among the bushes, and a little breeze moved the green foliage as it passed.

Tonatiuh sat there as the sun went down. She was there when the evening had far advanced, and when midnight came, she was still there. It had been a long, weary interval to her, and her heart had suffered during that period more than during years of her life.

Presently, she was suddenly惊起 (startled). Looking out through the window, she saw Mazina standing outside. Tonatiuh sprang eagerly to her feet, and the next moment they were clasped in each other's arms, — a warmth and fervency that would have become mother and child.

"O my mother! Mazina. "You said I might call you mother. I have been from my enemies. I have suffered so much since I was parted from you!"

"Yes, child!" responded Tenatiuh, "you may call me mother and I will find you a safe retreat; but tell me how all this has happened."

With simple, child-like confidence, Mazina related hastily the particulars of her and Maxtha's captivity, and of her escape through the assistance of a slave-girl and the priest; yet Maxtha was still a captive, and would probably die at the hands of his enemies; and she wept convulsively at the thought.

Tenatiuh consoled her with many words of encouragement, and, in turn, recited her own sad thoughts and experiences. "But the dear priest—where is he?" she exclaimed.

"I am here, good lady," he replied, stepping forward. "Mazina is weary. She has travelled far and fast, and needs repose. Can you provide her with a safe place of concealment until I call again in a few days? She has told me of your previous kindness to her. Will you still continue to be her friend?"

"While I live she has none better," Tenatiuh responded with much feeling. "Leave her with me. I pledge my life for her safety."

"It is enough! Be of good cheer, Mazina. I will bring you tidings of Maxtha, ere the sun has rose and set twice."

Maxtha Ytzcatl flew over the mountain at the top of his speed. The full moon shone down in all its splendor, presenting to the eye a beautiful scene, spread out in the clear light.

While hurrying forward between two high rocks, he detected a moving shadow across his path. Looking up he beheld three men rushing down the steep declivity, directly upon him, and one glance revealed the foremost figure as being that of Toluna. In an instant the truth flashed upon the sculptor's mind that he had been pursued, overtaken, and now would have to fight if he would escape.

"Ah!" hissed Toluna, with a taunting voice, "you have not yet eluded my grasp. This hour is your last. You shall die, base slave that you are!"

"Not by your dastard hands!" responded Maxtha, armed with the *maquahuitl* and shield. "Let him who is in most haste to die make the first assault. Come on, villains, the whole of you!" he shouted.

With a sneering laugh, Toluna ordered his followers to aim their darts. One instant two cords were drawn back, till the *itztli*-pointed arrows rested against the taut-strained bow, and the shafts poised for their fatal mission.

With perfect self-possession Maxtha threw his shield into use, and with the heavy *maquahuitl*, dashed furiously upon his foes. The onset was so unexpected, and the assault so terrific that the weapons were hurriedly discharged. One arrow missed him altogether, and the other bounded harmlessly away from the shield. A fierce sweep of the *maquahuitl* felled one of the assailants dead at the sculptor's feet, while the others retreated a few paces, then rallied, and came again

to the attack. Mezatl well understood that his success depended upon instant action, for, did his foes once escape from the reach of his weapon, they could easily dispatch him with their arrows. Without giving his adversary time to recover from the surprise of the assault, he brought another foe to the ground.

Toltec's previous knowledge of the sculptor's prowess had made him wary, and he purposely kept from the reach of his sword. The only hope he had of success was with the arrows; but, unwittingly, he had brought his man too near, and the result we have seen.

As the second man fell, Toltec, with a curse, fled precipitately. At that instant his ears were saluted with a mocking laugh, and he beheld Montezuma's waiting maid, who was waving the branch of a tree in apparent triumph. Instead of the squealing voice of the half-witted fool, he heard the cool, menacing tones of Mezatl, and her words quickened his pace into a frantic retreat.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GLORY OF THE "HALLS OF MONTEZUMA."

The sun clung to the Spanish quarters in the Aztec capital. The period during which they had been in the city, was one of deep interest to them, and one also of imminent danger. They had, however, experienced nothing but the most friendly treatment from the emperor; still, the mind of Cortez was far from being at ease.

No one who has ever read of Montezuma's conduct toward the invading Spaniards on that memorable occasion, can fail to be impressed with his enormous spirit, and more than barbarian malice. To that very virtue did he owe the loss of his empire, for his Christian conqueror was a traitor of the most monstrous character. Montezuma lost his throne by too great trust in a Christian's word. Cortez won it by artifice and treachery, which made even his age shudder. Had Montezuma possessed the fiery spirit of his brave nephew, Cuauhtemoc, the Spaniards would never have entered the capital — which never would have left it, except in the smoke and ashes of the ruined altar, when their bodies were given to the flames.

Cortez's first movement on the morning following his triumphant entrance into the capital, was to pay a visit — by permission — to the imperial palace. On this occasion, he was accompanied by a band of tried followers, in whom he could place the most implicit confidence, and who were clad in burnished steel, with warlike accoutrements of the most formidable kind.

They found the emperor seated in a spacious saloon, surrounded by a few of his favorite chiefs. He received the bearded stranger with the most marked respect.

Cortez, without needless delay, and perhaps without much reasoning, broached the subject nearest his heart. He was sensible of the vast advantage to be obtained, if the royal heath could be converted to the Holy Catholic faith, thereby wielding a powerful influence toward the ultimate conversion of the Indians, and the present subjugation of the empire.

Montezuma listened attentively, until Cortez had concluded, when he replied, that he knew the Spaniard's God was a good one; but his gods were good enough for him. What his visitor had said about the creation of the world, was what he had been taught to believe. It was not worth while to discourse further of the matter.

The interview closed by the emperor distributing valuable presents among the Spaniards, who, notwithstanding their iron hearts as well as mail, were touched with the hospitality and kindness displayed by Montezuma.

Thoughts of quite a different nature, filled the mind of Cortez, who saw around him, the evidences of civilization, and consequent power. In the general appearance of the capital, its elegant architecture, its luxurious social accommodations, its activity in trade and mechanical skill, he beheld the enlarged resources of an opulent and populous community, while, in the dense crowds that thronged the streets, were indications of an immense population, capable of vast revenue, if they could but be brought into subjection. He foresaw the importance of becoming perfectly acquainted with the capital, the character of its population, with the nature and amount of its resources, ere he could determine upon any final course of action. With this view, he asked permission of Montezuma to visit the principal public buildings.

The population of Tenochtitlan, or Mexico, was at that time estimated at three hundred thousand souls, though it was probably much larger.

Cortez, having made himself familiar with the customs, habits, and forms of Montezuma's court; the great extent of his possessions; the sumptuous manner of his living; the lounge paid him by his subjects; the pomp and grandeur of his entertainments; turned his attention to one of the most remarkable features in this semi-civilized city — the *Tianquez*, or great market. Here the Spaniards were astonished at what they beheld. The crowd of people pressing eagerly toward the market-square, was immense; and, on entering the grounds, Cortez and his followers' surprise was increased into amazement at the multitude as well as size, of the inclosure, with the products and articles offered for sale. Every thing was in the most systematic order throughout the entire square. Officers were in continual attendance, whose business consisted in collecting the duties imposed on each huckster, regulating the measures, and bringing

counselors to justice. A court of twelve judges sat in one part of the temple, who — extreme severity, in more instances than one, proved that they were rigid in maintenance of law. To every commodity was allotted its particular place. In one stall, were bales of cotton, piled up in the raw material, or manufactured into dresses, articles of ornament and domestic use. Another was assigned to a goldsmith, who made a great display of his ingenious collection. In another were specimens of pottery, vases, and trinkets of exquisite workmanship. In others, were hatchets made of copper, alloyed with tin — a fair substitute for iron. Cases curiously fashioned, representing different animals, and dyed with rich colors; the escutched or quilted doublet, surmounted with feathers, pearls, and precious stones; armors, lances, and the broad rapier. There were also robes and mirrors made of *manta*, which served the purpose of standards that truly wild and fierce.

There were booths in the square, occupied by barbers, who used the native razors in the performance of their vocation. Other shops were conveniently apportioned, well provided with drugs, roots, and other medicinal preparations. Conspicuous upon the tables and shelves, were black books or maps, framed in yellow picture writing. These articles are made of cotton, skins, or fibers of *agave* — the Aztec papyrus, and so soft like a fan.

Everywhere, the exquisitely prepared poultry, fruit, viands, and confections. Dishes of spicy, flavoring *cacao* were set out on purples to tempt the appetite; while every stall and portico was lined with fresh flowers — the spontaneous growth of their luxuriant soil.

Thus, at one glance, did the Spaniards obtain a complete type of the industrial resources of the nation, through the strolling visit to the great Aztec capital.

The currency was a source of much speculation among the Spaniards. It consisted of small bits of tin, stamped with the letter T; bags of silver, and transparent pills of gold dust. In all their dealings, it was a matter of fact, that these people knew nothing of scales and weights. They were invariably governed by measures and numbers.

From this inspection, the Spaniards turned their attention to the great pyramid. It was situated in a vast area, encircled by a wall, which was covered on the outside, with representations of serpents cut in relief, and which gave it the name of *coyolcalli* — "Wall of the Serpents."

When Cortez ascended at the foot of the pyramid, he found the Emperor in his bower, waiting the Spanish general's arrival. Two priests, called *Aztec*, or *Tepehuacan*, then general of Mexico, then stepped forward to receive the general upon their threshold, and carry him to the audience; but Cortez declined the compliment, and placing himself at the head of his followers, marched boldly up the ascent.

Having reached the top, an excellent view was presented. He

could discover the great metropolis, at one sweeping glance, around which lay the clear waters of Texcoco. The Spanish soldiers were filled with admiration, and spoke openly of the grandeur of the work. Far off, in an unbroken line, they could behold the base of that great range of mountains, surrounding the valley, and their icy summits glittered in the bright sunlight.

Having indulged in the grand spectacle, until they were satisfied, Cortez asked permission to enter the temples and examine the shrines of their gods. To this, Montezuma, after a short consultation with the priests, consented; and, in person, he escorted the Spaniards into their sacred sanctuaries — there being two on the pyramid.

The first entered, was a large, gilded apartment, and before the altar stood the statue of *Huitzilopatchli* — the war-god of the Aztecs. His countenance was distorted, hideous, and emblematic of fierce passion. His right hand wielded a huge bow, and his left held a golden arrow, while his trappings were those supposed by the superstitious people to belong to the deity; yet, the most prominent ornament was a chain of solid gold and silver hearts, strung alternate, and suspended around his neck, indicating the sacrifice in which he took the most delight. There was, however, a more evident token of his character in the forms of three human hearts, then smoking and quivering on a golden platter before the huge image. The sight caused a cold shudder to pass over the Spaniards, for alas! they knew not but a similar fate was in reserve for them!

The other temple was devoted to a milker god. It was called *Tezcatlipoca*, the one who created the world and watched over it. This image was represented as a young man, and was hewn from black stone, highly polished. This god was decorated, and armed as a warrior. His armor and weapons were all garnished with gold and jewels; yet he — like his neighbor — had a peculiar relish for dainty diet, as the Spaniards discovered before him five bleeding hearts, just torn from the reeking breasts of the sacrificed victims.

The walls and floor of these temples, were besmeared with human blood, and the stench was most offensive; while the priests, with garments stiff with the dried blood, and their faces painted with coarse characters of mystic import, moved hurriedly to and fro, among the Spaniards.

From these foul abodes, Cortez gladly retreated, and descended to the hard paved court below, where he made a careful survey of the buildings in the inclosure.

The principal attraction in this quarter, was the schools for the instruction of youth of both sexes, drawn chiefly from the high and wealthy classes. The girls were taught by priestesses, and the boys by male instructors, while the middle class deportment was rigidly enforced throughout every department of the institution.

During these wanderings, which were extended through every part of the capital, Cortez was always under the immediate eye of Montezuma, to whom he looked for protection, and, but for whose presence,

he would have fared as the sacrificial victim in the hands of the excited and insulted populace.

The Spanish general saw every move of the people. He watched them with the eye of a hawk, and detected many circumstances which I think to believe that an open revolt against their sovereign was contemplated; in which case, his own fate, and that of his army, was not a matter of conjecture or probability, but a certainty. Every Spaniard in the capital, would die on the sacrificial stone, to appease the wrath of the gods, whom they had seen on the great *teocalli*!

In this trying emergency, Cortez concocted a scheme which none but the most daring man in the most desperate extremity would have conceived.

The crisis had come! Something must be done, and that speedily. Cortez looked around upon his four hundred Spaniards, and his Mexican allies, then without the walls of his immediate quarters; then bethought less than five hundred thousand Aztecs, who were only held in check, out of respect to Montezuma, whom they had so long honored and obeyed.

In the midst of these exciting scenes, Maxtla Ytzcoatl reached the imperial palace, and was soon followed by the tireless Mezili, the half-blind riding-maill of the czars.

CHAPTER XV.

CORTEZ AS THE INVADER AND CONQUEROR.

It was no sooner known to Montezuma that the sculptor was in the palace than a courier was dispatched, demanding an immediate interview. Maxtla obeyed the royal mandate, without hesitancy, and, although questioned by the emperor as to where he had been, he promptly availed himself of a direct answer. The substance of the interview was an express direction on the part of the monarch to have the messenger compelled in the shortest possible time, that he might exhibit the well-ridiculed garment to his friends — the Spaniards.

Maxtla was surprised at the great change in the actions of the people, throughout the entire capital, and apparently of the whole nation during those days. All business had stopped, everybody was talking; the burden of their conversation was: "The strangers! — The strangers!"

On the second day, Cortez held a council at the street corner, near the temple of Quetzalcoatl, in Xochimilco, and took from the Indians a declaration that they were thicker and thicker; while so ret-

avowed purpose being to condemn the sovereign in his course toward the detested invaders. Vigilant committees were appointed to watch the progress of the Spaniards, and to note the movements of Montezuma. Couriers were sent into the country in every direction, calling upon the people to gather in and around the capital, to be ready in case of need.

It was a period of painful suspense to Cortez and his faithful followers; yet this matchless man of nerve was as calm and self-possessed as if walking the rounds of his own garden in Havana. He had already matured his plans — such plans as only his daring soul would have conceived, and only his heart of iron and nerves of steel would execute. That plan embraced, in its consummation, the seizure of the hospitable monarch. His idea was to march to the royal palace, and bear Montezuma back to the Spanish quarters by fair means if possible, by force if necessary, but, at any and at all hazards, to get possession of his person.

Cortez found a shallow pretext for this remarkable movement, in the fact that two Spaniards had just been murdered in a neighboring province, by order of the governor — Quauhquepea, one of Montezuma's confidential birds.

With a chosen band of his most trusty followers, the Spanish general visited the imperial palace, and after a few common-place remarks with the sovereign, informed him of his suspicions that he was cognizant of the alleged murders. Montezuma was surprised at the accusation, yet managed to conceal his feelings. The General insisted that the monarch should send and arrest the offenders, irrespective of position, and have them brought to the capital for examination. To this Montezuma consented, and dispatched an officer, empowered with a royal signet, which the sovereign took from his wrist. The messenger was authorized to command Quauhquepea, and all implicated in the murders, to appear forthwith, at the imperial court. He was also empowered to call upon the people to enforce the mandate if he met with opposition.

When the officer had departed, Cortez assured Montezuma that his prompt action convinced him of his innocence in the plot; but that it was necessary that their great sovereign, across the water, should also be convinced. Nothing would conduce so much to the establishing of friendly feelings as to have the emperor occupy the same palace with the Spaniards, until the examination of the governor was concluded and the matter settled.

Montezuma listened to this proposition with perfect amazement, and replied: "When was it ever known that a great prince like myself, voluntarily left his own palace to become a prisoner in the hands of strangers?"

Cortez assured the indignant monarch, that he should not go as a prisoner, but should meet with the most respectful treatment, and should continue to hold intercourse with and exercise power over his people as usual.

"If I shall consent to such degradation," the monarch answered; "my subjects would not."

Two hours were devoted in vain efforts to induce the monarch to accede to it, of his own free will, when a high minded cavalier, impatient at the delay, cried out—

"Why do you waste words with the barbarian? We have gone so far to reach him. Let us seize him, and if he resists, plunge our swords into his body."

The ferocious and sanguine aspect of the speaker alarmed the monarch, who inquir'd of Martin* what was meant. He, under Cortez's instruction, told Montezuma, that it was the command of their sovereign, as is the way, when the troubled emperor either through physical or superstitious fear, reluctantly consented to the desires of his conquerors.

If he possessed the spirit of his nephew, Gautemazin, he would have called his nobles around him, and let his heart's blood on the threshold, ere he would have borne with such unparalleled effrontery as the Spaniards had shown, and have been dragged a prisoner from his own palace.

Cortez gave instant orders for the royal palanquin, and immediately the monarch was being conveyed to the Spanish quarters. Prison now returned to the emperor, and, since he must be, it should appear with his free will, — a still more fortunate event for the success of the daring enterprise. As the retinue marched through the streets, escorted by the Spaniards, a wild tumult gathered thick around them. So threatening was the mob, that the Spaniards trembled for the result; and had not Montezuma, by command of his evil genius — for such was Cortez — called out for the people to disperse, not one of those bold adventurers would have reached the garrison.

The hubbub continued to increase rapidly after Montezuma entered the Spanish quarters, and the monarch was compelled to send out his nobles, ordering the populace to disperse and return to their homes.

They obeyed, but with a bad grace; and it was evident to Cortez that the fount of resentment was but checked for a brief period, when it would burst with greater force. Still the ever-watchful general kept, by sudden and ill movements, to overawe the people, and rule them under his subjection.

* Martin, a bold cavalier, over the Tlascans, shortly after his arrival in Mexico, was sent by Cortez to the court of Montezuma, to demand the delivery of the emperor. He was received by the Spaniards with great courtesy, and presented to the emperor, who, however, was too much afraid to leave his capital, to expose himself to the fury of the Spaniards. But Cortez, who was desirous of making himself master of the empire, and of gratifying his ambition, sent him back to the court of Montezuma, as the mark of his displeasure.

Could the truth have been known, at that period of Cortez's career, it would have shown that he would have gladly retreated from the capital, could he have seen even a possibility of escape. Hemmed in on all sides by unsurmountable obstacles he presented a bold and defiant front, apparently undaunted in his purpose, but in reality unflinching from the very desperation of his fortunes.

He had accomplished one great achievement, and held a powerful hostage for the future security of himself and his little army; yet, he did not pause, but went still further, and humbled the noble, generous Aztec sovereign, down into the very dust.

When Quiauhpopoca, the guilty governor arrived, he was coolly received by his emperor, and referred to Cortez for examination — could he have done otherwise?

Here the Aztec noble was dealt with in a summary manner by the Spaniards, who intended to make a severe example of him, for the special benefit of the natives, hoping thereby to impress them with the might and importance of the power of the invaders.

The governor and his accomplices were sentenced to be burnt alive, and the faggots were drawn by the emperor's permission, from the royal arsenals around the *teocallis*. The piles were immense, and consisted of bows, arrows, javelins, shields, and other weapons — a plan purposely arranged by Cortez, who hoped to destroy as large an amount of the native arms as possible. During this movement the populace looked on with a stupefied astonishment, supposing the great sacrifice of property, to be made by command of their sovereign.

The crowning act of Cortez, on this occasion, was a fair characteristic of the man. While the preparations for the execution were going on, the general, attended by one soldier, bearing fitters in his hand, entered the apartment where Montezuma sat brooding over his misfortunes, and, with a severe aspect charged the monarch with having instigated the murders of which his subjects were about to suffer. He then ordered the soldier to place the shackles upon the emperor's ankles, and coolly waited until it was done, then turned short upon his heel, and left the room.

This act rendered Montezuma speechless. He appeared as one struck dumb, and offered no resistance. His faithful attendants, bathed in tears, offered their condolence. They even held his feet in their laps, and inserted portions of their garments between the royal ankles and the cold iron, but they could not reach the iron that had entered the monarch's heart.

Meanwhile, the execution went on, and the victims died with Indian fortitude. Not one muscle moved during the awful ordeal. When the fearful sentence had been executed, Cortez re-entered Montezuma's presence, and kneeling down, removed the fitters, apologizing for the necessity of subjecting him to such punishment; while the sovereign, who, a month but a week before would have made the whole nation tremble, was now craven enough to think his

deliverer for his freedom! Such was the effect of the astonishing bravado of Cortez.

The nature of our narrative forbids us to enter into a detailed recital of the incidents of that momentous time. The record of facts all now is clear and definite which would slake the thirsts of any historian in congest. We will, however, gratify the reader, whose attention must be greatly excited in these incidents, by quoting from our late learned Prescott, to whose elaborate and classic works on the Conqueror, we are indebted for many of the incidents presented in this page. He says:

"These events were certainly some of the most extraordinary on the pages of history. That a small body of men, like the Spaniards, should have entered the palace of a mighty prince, have seized his person in the midst of his vessels, have borne him off a captive to their quarters — that they should have put to an ignominious death his son, his heir, his successor, his executioner, probably, his own comrade, and have exulted over it by putting the monarch in irons like a common thief — that this should have been done, not to a despised and abject in the decay of his fortunes, but to a proud monarch in the pinnacle of his power, in the very heart of his capital, surrounded by thousands and tens of thousands, who trembled at his nod, and would have poured out their blood like water in his defense, — that all this should have been done by a mere handful of adventurers, is a thing too extravagant, altogether too improbable, for the pages of romance! It is nevertheless, true!"

According to the policy of Cortez, rigor of action and bravery won the day. Whatever may have been the feeling among the people, they did not exhibit it publicly, but gradually submitted step by step, until the Spanish general had triumphed over the innumerable host of his enemies. He set his foot on the neck of princes, and the great Aztec emperor was trampled in his hands for accomplishing this work. He then explored the surrounding country, sought out the gold and silver mines, and dove far down into the earth, after precious stones.

With ten, and a garrison of natives, were performing this work, Cortez called Montezuma and his collectors, that they might visit the principal cities and provinces, attended by a cortege of Spaniards, to pay the customary tribute in the name of the Castillo de Leon. As the moment thus collected, Montezuma called an assembly of his nobles and court; and when all had been gathered before the Spanish general, it formed "three great heaps."

Montezuma said, "The Aztec general regretted that it was no longer possible to supply, Montezuma," — the name by which he addressed the Emperor, "and that it was terrible in your animals, that Montezuma could not supply you further."

It is well known that the end of Cortez in the capital, during which time he had ravaged the country with full sway. At

this period, however, a sudden change came over the aspect of his affairs, and every precaution that prudence and good judgment could devise was exercised to meet the threatened emergency. The soldiers ate, drank, and slept, fully armed and equipped, and their horses were ready caparisoned, day and night. The guards were doubled, and the little garrison was nearly in a state of siege.

This untoward movement was occasioned by the Spaniards interfering with the Aztec religion, thereby incurring the displeasure of the priesthood — the most dangerous point upon which they could have touched.

In all semi-civilized states of society, the priests, as a usual thing, hold unbounded authority. It was thus with the Brahmins of the East — the Brahmans of India — the Magi of Persia — the Druids of early Britain — the priests of Ancient Egypt and Assyria, and those of Mexico.

To all still more to the hazardous position of the Spaniards, on this perilous occasion, terrors reached them from the coast, that a large armed force from Cuba had landed, headed by Panfilo de Narváez, whose avowed purpose was to capture Cortez as a traitor, and take him in irons to Spain.*

Cortez was sorely puzzled how to proceed under these difficulties; but, as ever, there was a magic influence in his movements, and in a short space of time, he had sublated the threatened Aztec insurrection, placing himself again on good footing, not only with the populace, but with the priesthood, whose wrath he had enkindled by the desecration of their temples and the destruction of their wooden and jewel belazoned deities before whose altars human blood had run like a river. He then turned his attention toward the movements of Narváez, who having landed and possessed himself of Vera Cruz and the forts near by, was making bold and defiant threats of what he could and would do with the untrustworthy invaders. Cortez knew if he remained in the capital where he then was, he could not hope to contend successfully with the formidable force which his rival brought against him, augmented as it would be by the disaffected Aztecs, who would willingly join with him in rescuing their sovereign from the grasp of the usurpers. And yet if he marched against Narváez, he must abandon all he had accomplished, by leaving the capital again in the hands of the emperor.

He finally decided to intrust the garrison, in the capital, to his warm personal friend, Pedro de Alvarado, whom he cautions to ex-

* General Narváez, was sent to the coast under the command of the viceroyalty of New Spain, in command of Cuba, where Cortez had the command, but took up his quarters at Veracruz, and so cut off Cortez from the assistance of the Spanish government. This was the origin of the rebellion of Cortez, his forces being composed of his own troops, and those of the Spanish government, and of the garrison of the city. Not long after this, he had a conference with the general of Cuba, and obtained his consent to march with him to the coast, and to be his chief general, and return with them to Cuba for, apparently, the crown of Mexico.

and to defend it if necessary, and by all means to keep possession of the Aztec sovereign, for in that rested all their authority in the land.

From Mayapan, Cortez exacted a promise to remain friendly with his people until he returned, assuring him that, if he did, their great river, which the water shall know it, but, if he proved false, he should be the first to fall. The general then took his leave of the capital, and was escorted across the causeway by Montezuma and a host of his nobles under a strong guard of Spaniards.

Cortez left no less than a hundred men in the garrison, with all the artillery, and nearly all the horses; and took with himself only seventy soldiers, with whom to cope with an army of nine hundred veterans, fully armed and equipped, and led by old experienced generals. The cool, calculating Cortez, did not rely upon strength to accomplish the victory. It must be done with artifice and superior strategy. With this view he marched boldly and confidently into the enemy's country. During this time, he was reinforced by his own cavalry, previously scattered through the country, and by deserters from Narváez's army, until his little band numbered two hundred and forty-six, yet their arms were woefully deficient.

Narváez was then still held in the city of Coapultla, on the eastern coast, and for a time no negotiations were carried on between him and his general victim, yet with no result in any thing like honor or justice to the general's. When all fair means had been exhausted, and Narváez had failed to pursue his right course, Cortez began preparing for a surprise assault.

The bold stroke was carried into effect during an awful storm, which raged with great fury. Cortez and his followers had previously agreed to march to the seashore as was practicable, and, as the night was dark, they made of all haste that shelter which they could find, and lay low. A steady, though hurried march toward the coast followed some of struggle. They pressed forward without beat of drum or sound of trumpet, while each man fully realized the importance of the moment, and was resolved to die or conquer.

Leaving the suburbs of the city, Cortez was surprised at not finding a regular system of entry, and the fact of this deficiency of equipment in so important a point, gave him new courage in the assault. The storm raged with unabated fury — the falling snow, the constant roll of thunder, and the roaring of wind as it swept the earth, baffle all the sound of the soldiers' footsteps, causing them to all move with noise.

They did not, however, move steadily enough altogether to dislodge. So no charge was given. Then follow an exciting scene of strife and blood. Men are springing to their feet, endeavoring to find room, with harkent, and from amidst them, came loud hisses and roar into the fray.

That instant a bright flash lit up a long line of battlement, followed by a deafening sound of cannon, as the artillery poured a mass of shot and canister through the street; but Cortez had previously divided his little company, and each party marched close to the buildings on either side of the thoroughfare. Thus the shot did no execution whatever, and only served to arouse the inhabitants of the little city.

Cortez had now reached the inclosure, surrounding the *tzocalli*, where Narvaez and his army were stationed, and without giving them time to reload, he sprang upon the wall, shouting the watch-word of the night —

“ *Espiritu Santo! Espiritu Santo!* ”

CHAPTER XVI.

IN PRISON AGAIN.

We have anticipated the progress of our story by several months, in order to render consecutive the narrative of Cortez and his drama — shall we say his tragedy? Let us now return to pick up the threads of the story we are weaving, and hasten it to its final consummation.

We saw Mazina restored to Tonatiuh, in her enclosure at the *tzocallis*, through the kind offices of the priest, who ever seemed near her when danger threatened, or when his coming could do good. His wonderful ubiquity of bodily presence seemed something preternatural — no space, nor time, nor danger interposed to prevent his unwearied watchfulness over Mazina and Maxtla. Whoever he was — and his impenetrable mask defied all scrutiny of his face — he certainly held the youthful lovers in tender regard, and they seemed to realize something of right and authority in his coming and going. Only in the end can we draw aside that mask to discover whose face and eyes have so long looked behind it.

On the evening after Mazina's return from her imprisonment in the mountain caves, she was seated with Tonatiuh at the entrance of the home of the prophetess. The night was very fair; stars shone overhead like angels' eyes peering through the empyrean of heaven's floor; sweetest airs of orange and palm groves floated around, diffusing that sense of the beautiful which fills the soul with a fitness of peace. So charmed were the hours that they rapidly fled; and far into the night the two sat at the cave-door, thinking and feeling, rather than to break the silence even by their whispers.

Suddenly they were startled by the cry of an infant, apparently

but a short distance away. They listened and heard it again. Both sprang forward in the direction of the sound to discover the child, if child it was, out there in the night, perchance alone. They had not proceeded far, when two men stepped in front of them. Tonatiuh caught Mazina by the arm and sprang back; but it was too late. They were firmly bound together by the wrists, and their mouths gagged, until they could not speak.

"Ah! my pretty one!" sneered Toluma. "Once again I have you in my power, and I give you good security that you do not escape me this time."

One there was whose cunning the villain could not entrap, and she was intent now to fill and curse her foe: — Metzli saw and heard all; and as Toluma drove his prisoners away, she bounded like a deer into the city and was soon lost in its shadows and silences.

It was several moments ere the captives really understood how they were situated, or what had taken place. So sudden and unexpected was this seizure, it was not until Tolomea ordered them to proceed that they were fully impressed with the truth of their position, and trembled in view of what they might expect.

It was after midnight when they reached the bank of Tezumel, near the western city-way, leading to the capital. Here they were ushered into a boat, which lay moored to the beach, and were rapidly but silently pulled across the lake, and soon found the doors of Lord Almiztli's palace opening to receive them.

Here the cruel hand that held the captives together. Mazina was conducted to a large apartment by a slave, thoroughly instructed in his duty. He removed the ligament from her wrists, the bandage from her eyes, and quickly returned, having closed the door upon the maid, securing it upon the outside. She was again a prisoner.

Meanwhile Tonatiuh was escorted to a distant part of the palace, and placed in a small, damp dungeon. Neither the bandage across her mouth, nor the cords on her wrists were removed, notwithstanding they were tied so tight as to be very painful.

At an early hour on the following morning twelve men were arrested, and sent to appear before Monteazuma. They were accused of conspiring against the emperor's life, and, so stricken were they by the emperor's pale, distressed look, that they soon confessed their guilt, implicating Lord Almiztli as the instigator of the plot. It appeared that the march had been made in painted with all the colors in a most disorderly manner. His decision was quickly and firmly pronounced. He ordered that the twelve men be taken to the great scaffold, and there offered as a human sacrifice; and he further commanded that Lord Almiztli should be summoned to witness the execution of the decree, while his own share in the plot should be made public by the heralds.

Tonatiuh may have some knowledge of this sentence, in which many criminals of the Aztecs were punished yearly, according

in the capital but throughout every province, we will dwell a moment upon this bloody, inhuman rite, held sacred by their religion.

Brantz Mayer, in his history of the Conquest, has given us a condensed, yet full description of this fearful holocaust. He says :

" This sacrifice was performed by a chief priest and six assistants. The principal flamen, habited in a red scapulary fringed with cotton, and crowned with a circlet of green and yellow plumes, announced, for the occasion, the name of the deity to whom the offering was made. His acolytes, clad in white robes embroidered with black, their hands covered with leathern thongs, their foreheads filled with parti-colored papers, their bodies dyed perfectly black, prepared the victim for the altar; and, having dressed him in the insignia of the deity to whom he was to be sacrificed, bore him through the town bearing arms for the temple. He was then carried to the summit of the *teocalli*, where four priests extenuated him across the curved surface of an arched stone placed on the sacrificial stone, while another laid his head firmly beneath a heavy yoke. The chief priest—the *tzitzin* or sacrificer—then stretched the breast of the victim tightly by bending his body back as far as possible, and, seizing the obsidian knife of sacrifice, cut a deep gash across the region of the captive's heart. The extreme tension of the flesh and muscles at once yielded beneath the blade, and the heart of the victim palpitated in the bloody gap. The sacrificer immediately thrust his hand into the wound, and tearing out the quivering vital, threw it at the feet of the idol,—inserted it with a golden spear into the mouth,—or, after offering it to the deity, consumed it in fire, and preserved the sacred ashes with the greatest reverence. When this horrid rite was finished in the temple, the victim's body was thrown from the top of the *teocalli*, whence it was borne away and converted into a cannibal feast by the populace, or devoured to feed the tigers in the royal menagerie."

How these people, semi-civilized and enlightened as they certainly were, could have tolerated such a horrid rite, is just comprehendible. That Montezuma, who, in all his deportment, exhibited a truly noble, humane, and generous disposition, should have sanctioned the practice, not only of human sacrifice, but making feasts of the victim's flesh, is equally incomprehensible, and a subject of wonder.

After Tezcatlipuh and Mazina were placed in different apartments in Lord Ahuitzotl's palace, Tchica procured a light and visited the cell where the prophetess was imprisoned. Having removed the bandage from her face, he asked her in a sneering tone :

" Do you remember the scene on the island, where you predicted such fearful events yet to take place during my life?"

" I spoke the truth!" she answered.

" You know too much—altogether too much! This little cell is quite large enough for any person having such extensive information."

tion," retorted the villain with hate and fear written upon his every feature.

"Tlaco Rikita! I will yet learn that Tonatiuh has told him the truth. He will yet tremble as a leaf shaken by the wind—humbled in the very dust, and die a felon's death." Her voice was fearfully clear and calm.

"If I do, you shall not bear witness against me!" he retorted, with fire in his serpent-like eyes.

"There are those who will," she replied. "If you have come here to taunt me, you have remained long enough. If you intend to release me at all do so at once, and save yourself the mortification of having others do it for you. I shall not dally words with you."

"Ha! ha! ha!" giggled the villain. "You talk well, but I tell you that you will never leave this cell. You shall die here, rot here; your dust shall lie here, mingled with that of many others who have perished here before you. When I leave you now, and close the door, it will never be reopened while you live; so you may be as calm and relaxed as you choose, or you may storm and rave to your heart's content. You see I am very obliging. So now, good-by, good mother priest! Go and lay down and die as soon as you can!" he said, as he passed from the dungeon. The door was closed with a dull, heavy sound.

"Is this what I shall have to suffer? Must I die thus? Is my life to be snuffed up forever in this drear place? Mazina—" she started suddenly; the door was opened.

"Tonatiuh!" spoke a low voice. "Tonatiuh! You here?"

"Mazina! is that you?" Her voice was husky, with her unusual emotion.

"Yes! Mazina will save you. Here, take my hand quickly, and I will lead you from this dirty cell."

"They are still tied!" exclaimed Tonatiuh, now greatly agitated.

Mazina caught hold of her arm, dragged her into the passage, and from thence into a small recess, off the passage, where they crouched beneath a stone seat. Some time had they to compose themselves, when Tlaco returned, bearing in his hand a ladle of molten lead, which he poured into the socket containing the spring, thus to remove all chance of opening the steel door, except by picking it to pieces.

Tonatiuh witnessed this with a beating heart. It may be guessed that she felt relieved when he again left the passage.

Half an hour later, Tonatiuh had departed from the hotel palace, and was crossing the great causeway, leading west from the capital.

Mazina, on being led into the apartment by the slave, endeavored to carry her mind to something like tranquillity. She was now in the apartment which she once occupied as her own, and where she had enjoyed many happy days. Then she was free to go

and come as she chose; but now she was a prisoner. The door had been closed upon her, and she knew full well for what purpose.

The long, weary, and hurried walk which she had been compelled to undergo, and the agony of mind under which she labored, so prostrated her whole system that she lay down on the edge of her bed, and unconsciously fell into a fitful slumber. Her excited imagination pictured frightful events. In the wanderings of her mind she saw her friends dragged from before her eyes, saw them persecuted nigh unto death, witnessed their tortures, until the cold perspiration stood in great drops upon her forehead. She was at length aroused by the sound of a footstep, and, on looking up, beheld Toluka, who had just come from the dungeon, where he had, as he supposed, permanently sealed and concealed the fate of Tenatiah. Mazina sprang from the couch, and fled to the farthest corner of the room, and cried:

"Away from me, monster! Away, I say! I hate your presence, and scorn your power! Away — away!"

"My dear Mazina," he replied, with mock respect, "I thought you would be lonesome, so I came to keep you company for an hour, as I leave the city before sunrise."

"Tell me, sir, why you persecute me in this manner? Have I ever committed an error, punishable with such base treatment as you have dealt out to me and my friends?"

"You are decidedly pointed in your remarks, my dear," he rejoined coolly. "You are mistaken, however, in asserting that I am your enemy, as I am directly the other thing — the best friend you have."

"Your actions exhibit your regard in a remarkably bad light," she haughtily replied. "If you have even respect for me, leave the apartment instantly, and never again force yourself upon my notice. Your conduct is more that of a fiend incarnate, than a human being."

"Really, I could not think of going until I had made a more agreeable arrangement with you;" and there was the streak of a devil in his tone. "You know that I have loved you long and devotedly — that I have, in times past, used every reasonable argument to convince you of my sincerity; but kind words and gentle treatment have had no effect. I therefore concluded to use my own means to obtain the covetous end, and I assure you that you shall be mine, either lawfully or unlawfully. You can make your own choice."

Mazina did not reply. The truth of her dreadful position came with overwhelming force upon her heart, and, bowing her head she sobbed aloud.

"I shall leave you for awhile," he all said, "but, during my absence you will be under the especial care and guardianship of Leopold Ahuitzotl, and will not be allowed to leave this apartment. Still, you shall be treated in every way as becomes your station. When I return you

"will understand more fully what I have said;" then, with a braughty air, he strode from the room, smiting the door on the outside.

Just before sun-down on the following day, an old, gray-haired woman, with bent form and palsied limbs, was passing through Lord Ahuitzotl's park. She leaned upon two sticks for support, and walked with slow, measured tread. Her garments were clean and tidy, but of coarse material. Around her neck was a cord, to which was attached a basket filled with light toys and ornaments, showing that she made her living by peddling these articles among families who had children.

Having approached near to the palace-entrance, she sat down on a bench, leaned her canes against the seat, and commenced arranging the trinkets from the basket into her lap. She had not sat there long, when Lord Ahuitzotl came hurriedly from the palace. Discovering her, he paused an instant. He had, apparently, entertained a thought which quickly vanished, and he passed on, taking no further notice of her, or care of him; but, suddenly he halted, turned back, and inquired if the articles were for sale?

She replied in the affirmative, when he purchased several toys, during which time he watched her closely, then said:

"Do you live about here?"

"I come from Texcoco," she answered, beginning to replace her merchandise in the basket again.

"Do you follow peddling for a living?"

"I have no one to look after me, and I must live as well as you can," and she began to adjust the cord about her neck, preparatory to starting.

"Would you remain with me in the palace if I would pay you well?" and he eyed her closely as he spoke.

"I am too old to labor, and need some one to do for me, rather than for me to do for somebody else," she said, rather tartly.

"The work is easy," he continued, growing more earnest; "in fact, there is no work to be done."

"If there is no work to be done, there will be no pay;" and she rose to depart.

"I will pay you in advance" he urged.

"How much?"

"One mill of gold dust a week, and you shall have slaves to wait upon you."

"What do you expect me to do?"

"Being a vermin to a young lady, who is insane, and who has to be confined in her room."

The woman struck her hand and started on, but stopped short, and remarked: "Is she hard to manage?"

"No — probably dull, and continues to assert that she is not crazy."

"I will try it a week," she said, and turned slowly toward the palace.

Soon Lord Alcitzol and the old woman entered the apartment where Mazin sat weeping. The moment that the old noble apparel, Mazin sprang forward, threw herself on her knees before him, and, with pleading accents cried:

"No, no! Do not say that I am crazy. Do not! You know I am not!"

The old conspirator, turning to the old woman who had accompanied him to the room, coolly said:

"This is the person I want you to take care of. You must not allow her to leave the room under any pretext whatever, nor allow any of the slaves to enter the apartment. If you are faithful you shall be liberally rewarded; if false, you will never leave the palace alive."

Mazin rose quickly, came close to the woman, laid her hand upon her shoulder, and gazed long and steadily upon her face. She then moved away to a seat in the corner, sat down, buried her face in both hands, and groaned in the most bitter anguish.

"Such things as you need or desire in any way will be furnished you by asking any of the slaves. I shall instruct them to that effect;" and the old heart of stone left the apartment. He passed directly to his favorite place of resort, the eastern corridor, where he commenced pacing to and fro among the clustering vines. His arms were folded, his gaze downcast, and his appearance that of deep, earnest meditation.

When the sun had set — when the evening shades had gathered thick around, and when darkness brooded over the city, Lord Alcitzol was still promenading the corridor. His mind did not appear more calm than when he first began his walk. Finally he took short, struck his hand firmly upon his brow, and, in a low, hollow tone, said:

"Yes, yes! It must be done! Maxta must die! He must be removed! Tolosa was a conformable fool that he let him escape, when he had all the advantage, and could have done the job without danger of detection. Now, there is a risk — a great risk, yet it must be accomplished. I have set my hand to this business, and there is no turning back. I have got Mazin safe! Now, to get rid of the sculptor; then the way is clear, and there shall be no accomplices this time! For my part I cannot tell how Montezuma learned the plot against his life, nor how he learned who the conspirators were; but, true it is, they were all arrested before day-light the next morning after the first meeting. Montezuma ordered that I should be present when they were scuttled. I do not well understand the movement. There is something that I do not understand it; but these invading strangers have taken off his attendants during the past few days, and it is well for me, perhaps, that they have. I will manage to remove Maxta first, then for my other plans. I know the apartment where he keeps at the imperial palace.

ace, and the room can be entered by means of which he knows very little. There is that strange priest; he has been hanging around the palace all day. I wish I knew who he was. Its dangerous meddling with these priests, but I will settle this one's account, if I can get a good chance. Toluca and Cruzilli will be here in a day or two, then look out! Yes, yes! look out! My authority can not be trampled upon with impunity; and the proud monarch shall feel the full weight of my vengeance. I will be revenged! I will —” he paused suddenly, turned, and beheld the strange priest standing before him!

CHAPTER XVII.

ACCUMULATION OF DISASTERS.

The forty-eight hours subsequent to the incidents of our last chapter, were of momentous interest to the Aztecs. During that period, their sovereign had unwittingly left his royal palace for an abode in the Spanish quarters, — become a prisoner, and a tool in the hands of the scheming Cortez, for the future subjugation of the empire. As might be supposed, matters of a domestic nature were more or less neglected.

While a certain portion of the community were conspiring against the invaders, another party was carrying out the wicked propensities of their undrilled passions; very few were pursuing their usual peaceful avocations. The affairs of government were in a semi-condition, — circumstances which rendered Toluca and Cruzilli's schemes the more easily accomplished: they could now return to the city and prosecute their base designs without fear of being molested.

It was the hour of midnight, when a man closely muffled about the face, entered the imperial court-yard, and moved hurriedly along through the dense crowd collected around the royal palace, clamorous with indignation and excitement.

Gutierrez had been addressing them on the subject of their sovereign's unexpected step, his sentiments had been expressed in bold, open language; yet, by his command, the enraged populace immediately dispersed, though not until they had pledged themselves, to a man, to stand by the prince in freeing their country of the Spaniards.

While these things were transpiring, Moxim, and the old mares provided by the noble, were stabled in the apartment into which Mati-

was taken by Toluca's orders. The few days in which they had been together, Mazina had completely exhausted herself in trying to engage her indifferent companion in conversation; but was barely able to obtain replies to her questions.

They sat in perfect silence. A deep melancholy rested upon the features of Mazina, while there was a marked sadness brooding over the countenance of her strange companion. During the few days of their acquaintance, Mazina had often detected the woman's attention placed upon her, and frequently noticed that she eyed her with a fixed gaze.

"You do not think that I am crazy, do you?" inquired Mazina, suddenly arousing herself.

"How can I tell?" was the answer. The old woman arose and left the room, leaving Mazina amazed at her conduct.

The woman had not been gone many minutes, when the door was reopened carefully, and a form glided into the room. Mazina did not look up, supposing, of course, that it was her who left the room a moment before, as no other person, except Lord Ahuitzol and Toluca had entered the apartment, since she was imprisoned in it.

"Mazina!" She started up with a bound.

"Maxtla!"

In an instant they were clasped in each other's arms.

"Maxtla!" she cried: "How did you reach this, my prison-house, which is guarded day and night?"

"Friends are near you, dear Mazina, and I have come to bid you be of good cheer. Our wrongs shall be carried to the emperor, where they will be redressed, and our enemies punished."

"I was just thinking," she remarked, "and wondering if we should ever again be happy as we used to. I was thinking—" She paused, her eyes filled with tears, her heart swelled, and she nestled close to his side. Arousing herself with a great effort, she added: "They say that I am crazy. Lord Ahuitzol makes this cruel accusation, and does not allow me to leave this room, or to see any person except the old nurse whom he has engaged to wait upon me. Do you think I am insane?"

"No, dear Mazina! but let them consider you so. Perhaps it will be best for the present, that you do not oppose them in this. A few days more, and this matter will be settled, when we shall be married and be beyond the reach of our enemies."

"Oh, that we may! 'Tis awful to be thus persecuted." Then seeming suddenly to recollect more forcibly how they were situated, she added: "We must not remain here a moment. Let us fly instantly. If Lord Ahuitzol should happen to find you here, I fear he would do you harm, in his anger."

"Have no fear of that, for he is a coward alone. All his villainy consists in plotting against defenseless women, who can not easily escape his machinations, and in concocting schemes for more daring ones to execute."

During this employ, the door had been left a little ajar, and a pair of bright keen eyes were peering through the aperture, upon the lovers.

The muffled figure, before alluded to, after stealthily reconnoitering, entered the apartment, assigned by Montezuma to the sculptor. All was silent there, was Maxtla asleep? The spy would see. Moving noiselessly toward the sleeping-rooms, all was suddenly illuminated with a brilliancy surpassing the sun's brightest rays. The man sprang backward and timidly staggered under the intensity of the light. In a moment he looked around: there stood Tenatihu, the Pugilist, directly before him, eyeing him with flashing eyes.

"Let Toltec Alariz I tremble, for Tenatihu has spoken! He can not escape the fate to which his deeds have brought him."

Tolca stood as one struck dumb. His muffling had fallen from his head and face, and his eyes glared wildly upon the figure before him. There was something so mystical and strange in her appearing to him as she did, that it filled his mind with superstitious fear, and, with frantic haste, he fled from the room. His steps echoed to a wild taunting laugh.

The room was immediately enshrouded in darkness again, and the woman of magic passed out into the open court.

Tolca, thus failed in his attempt to assassinate his rival, hurried away from the scene. Reaching the outside of the wall, surrounding the royal palace, he found Cruzilli awaiting his return, and they fled away together.

The same time that Tolca left the royal palace, Maxtla took his leave of Mazona, consulting her to be of good cheer, and remain where she was until the matter was permanently arranged by the emperor. He went forth from the presence of her he loved, with more hope than he had experienced for many days, and he wandered on through the great park, daunted with the prospect. He had proceeded but a short distance, when two men sprang out upon him, with such impetuosity, that, before he could resist, he was felled to the ground, bound hand and foot, drawn to a boat nearby, and thrown into it, followed by Cruzilli, who rowed off toward the great channel that led into the lake of Texcoco.

On the following morning, Mazona arose refreshed. It was considerably after mid-night when she retired, but such a load had been upon her heart, that the few hours of uninterrupted repose had but ill relieve, and restore much of her former buoyancy of spirits.

"Wise old soul, be still, when day shall be well bel, and forget thyself!" This thought possessed her whole being: she recalled nothing so present has, but to walk on air. Her old attenu-

dant she welcomed with a smile, and she was about to make some playful remark, when a low rap was given on the door, and Telucu entered. A chill passed over Mazina's heart, and her spirits sank with sudden heaviness into their old depths of sorrow. It was the first time his detested form had darkened the door since the night she was placed in the room as a prisoner, and she really conjectured that his presence at this time boded no good. She hoped that Maxtha would have seen the emperor, and arranged for their wedding, ere Telucu returned from the mountains; but, in this, she was disappointed.

"Ah! fair lady, I am glad to return once more, that I may commune with you, and I hope that we never again shall be separated for any great length of time."

He waited a moment for her answer, then added:

"I trust you have decided to look up'n my suit with more favor."

"I have not changed my mind, since I last spoke with you upon this subject," she replied. "The decision which I then made, is still the same."

The old attendant left the apartment, but remained outside listening with great earnestness.

"It matters not what your decision was," he continued, with a slight show of anger. "It will avail you little, if 'tis now in opposition to my desires. You must be my wife!"

"Not while living;" was the determined reply.

"Then when dead!" was the cool response. "Living or dead, you shall be mine."

"Never, you hateful wretch!"

"Spire your invectives, my lady, and be a submissive wife," he remarked, throwing unusual disdain into his tone. "I came only to inform you that we shall be privately married in this room, at sun-down this evening, when you will accompany me from the capital, to my home in the mountains."

She grew faint at the words, and could hardly utter:

"I am crazy, Lor! Ahuitzol says. You do not wish to wed one who is mad?"

"You have heard my decision. So sure as we both live till evening, so sure shall we be married." Without giving her time to make a reply, he turned and left the room, meeting, as by accident, the attendant at the door. He was soon out of sight in the distant rooms of the palace.

Mazina had maintained her composure during this scene, with remarkable fortitude, but the door no sooner closed, than she wept convulsively.

"O, Maxtha! Maxtha!" she sobbed. "Why did I not fly with you? Why did you counsel me to remain in the power of these soulless villains? You said that I had friends near. Where are they? Now, if ever, do I need a friend. I will dare the vigilance of my keepers, and seek the emperor. He shall —" She was interrupted

by the tall attendant, who came hurriedly into the apartment, bearing a bundle of clothes upon her arm. Her movements were so rapid, that Mazina was speechless with wonder.

The woman handed her the clothes, and said :

" Exchange your garments for these. Do it in the shortest possible time."

Mazina did not move.

" As you value your own life and happiness," the woman continued, " obey me, immediately!"

Mazina did obey. Assisted by the woman, her robes were soon exchanged for others, and the twain passed rapidly from the room, and through the thick foliage of the park, toward the canal.

They were soon seated in a light canoe, gliding swiftly over the waters of Fezirah, in a westerly direction. As they reached the bank, the strange priest was observed coming toward them. Mazina rushed eagerly forward, beseeching his protection, and urged to be conducted to Tonatiah, if she too had escaped from Teheran.

The priest bade her be of good heart, as friends were near. For a few moments, Mazina appeared lost in thought, but soon recovering, she looked suddenly around — there, in the place of her old attendant, stood Tonatiah herself. One instant, and they were clasped in each others' arms.

The priest made no scruple to convince Mazina that her old, pale, thin, child-like companion at the palace, was Tonatiah; but, after having been shown the outer garments, which the prophetess had worn over her own gay robe, the white hair which had concealed her bright glossy tresses, and the potent vial from which she had shielded her complexion; the astounded Mazina was forced to believe.

Tonatiah and Mazina soon sought the secret chambers, while the priest returned to the canoe to the capital.

Cruzel, with Maxila, bound and gagged, glided along the channel, until the boat was out upon the smooth, broad bosom of the lake, when he beat to the oars with a will, and the light bark shot as an arrow over the waters.

It was near daylight when he reached the northern bank, where it entered upon the Tigris. Here he placed stronger ligaments on the prisoner's wrists, and bound these around his ankles. He then caused him to step out on the land.

There was no alternative but to obey, and trust to fortune to escape, or claim the处罚. Cruzel sprang from the boat, strode to the rocky shore, and held his sword as he should a spear, assuring her that the last effort, or any act of opposition, would be punished with instant death.

In the ravine of the Tigris, and it was noon when they began their long descent to earth, during which

time, Maxtha had not tasted food or drink, and had suffered great agony from the cruel manner in which he was bound.

But he was destined still to endure. All that night he was compelled to travel at a rapid pace, and his strength was fast failing. He had tried his utmost to sever the cords on his wrists, or remove the gag from his mouth, but in vain. His inhuman captor laughed at his pain, and mocked his sufferings. Every groan was rewarded with a blow, every falter with a curse and a goad, until his trail was marked plainly by his blood.

As the first gray light of morning lit up the eastern horizon, they came upon the camp of a wandering tribe, with whom Cruzilli seemed familiar, and to whom he sold his captive as a slave, a greater punishment to the Aztec than death itself.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FROM THE CAGES TO THE FIELD OF CARNAGE.

The nature of our narrative forbids that we should detail the incidents which mark the career of Cortez in his conquest of Mexico. The whole record would, as we have already written, read like an Arabian Nights tale — so full of the wildest romance is the entire history of that conquest. We have introduced the conqueror and his achievements so far as they had relation to our more individual story; and we shall now pass over as briefly as possible that most wonderful period of time when the Spaniards accomplished the subjugation of the Aztecs.

We left Cortez on the battlements, at Cempalli, with the cry upon his lips of *Espiritu Santo!* as he rushed upon Narvaez. That cry was the precursor of victory. The emissary of Velasquez was not only conquered, but his well-equipped army became the compatriots of Cortez in the conquest. With recruited fortunes and forces, he again turned his face westward, for the most alarming accounts had come from the little garrison left in the capital: — the natives were all up in arms, determined upon the extermination of the Spaniards. The cruel Alvarado had murdered, in cold blood, six hundred of the flower of the Aztec nobility, as they were gathered at one of their annual feasts, and this act had stirred up in the hearts of the people a fire of hate, which only the blood of the invaders could extinguish. Cortez arrived after forced marches at the capital, to find all in a state of siege. Business was entirely suspended — the whole country around swarmed with Indians ready for the charge. That charge came. It came as if the very stones of the

earth became Indians— their numbers were so many. They swarmed every avenue of approach to the Spanish quarters, and though the cannone and musket-balls mowed them down like grain, thus did it arise out of the bloody corpse of one. Against such odds no force could stand, and Cortez planned a retreat—the most remarkable that lingers the page of human history with its story of human prowess and courage. The captive emperor, Montezuma, was, as a last hope prior to the retreat, brought to the battlements by order of Cortez, to exert his authority to compel his people to cease their sallies, as the Spaniards had all promised to leave the country. That act was his last. His countrymen, maddened by his weakness and submission in such an hour, pierced him with arrows and he was borne away to die—an oven of the fortunes which awaited his people after the very waters of the lake were crimsoned with their blood. In the midst of these scenes Lord Ahuitzotl moved—a very spirit of the fight. His hate of his sovereign impelled him to violence and when Montezuma apparel upon the battlements, to run with his people, it was Cruzilli's arrow, sped by the old Indian archer, which gave the monarch his death-wound. But there was yet more in store for these two men of blood. An Aztec, of stout frame, ran up the battlements— maybe a sign of distress to the Spaniards— seized a musket, and sent a ball with unerring aim into the old man's heart. Cruzilli was not spared—that spirit of the hawkish act of murder, spring to his side and with unfeigned fury toppled the brate over the aztec walls to the ground.

With this preface to the events of this chapter, let us resume the narrative.

Mazina and Medina, made good their escape to the secret chamber, and thence parted with the priest on the western beach of the lake, about the sunset, and flight from Lord Ahuitzotl's palace.

How they led him a spirituous course for seven months, and up to October 1st, Cortez returned from his expedition against General Narvaez on the coast, to encounter perils in the capital, which might well have ended his life.

During this interval, Mazina had not ventured even into the city of Tenochtitlán, having assumed the disguise of a basket-maker, and kept the little cavern. In this position she had been three months, lurking around, watching the premises; yet had she to realize, in the course habited basket-maker, either her own, or that of others, or that of papalitl, but content at the palace of the Emperor. She had but visited the secret chambers during this time, and had often seen him in the capital, to whom she often spoke of her mischances. Let us now return to Mazina, as she sits there in her cavern the prison, and see how the lapse of time has affected her.

No, as yet, she had known not her sorrows, while there was an innocent and unbroken sin her in her heart. Her long treasured

hung loose around her shoulders; her robe was neat, but no ornaments were upon her person, except a gold locket and chain on her neck. She had been seated one day, in a long reverie, from which, with apparent effort, she aroused herself, while the words dropped slowly from her lips:—

“ Oh, this suspense is dreadful! Seven long months since I have heard a word from Maxtha, and he cannot be found in the whole capital. I fear—I know evil has befallen him. Tonatiuh says the priest has made use of every effort in his power to learn where the sculptor is. I think he has been killed. ‘Tis fearful to count a pirate, but I am sure that he has been murdered, else he would have sought refuge here. This would not have occurred but for the Spaniards in the capital. Montezuma was once my warm friend, and I know he is now, but he is a prisoner and has little time to attend to petty domestic affairs. O Maxtha! where are you? Why do you not?”

She was interrupted by Tonatiuh, having just returned from the capital, came suddenly into the apartment, and exclaimed: “ Maxtha! there are fearful times in the city. A very large army of Spaniards entered it yesterday, and the people are preparing to attack them in their garrison. It will be an awful moment, and I shudder to wonder if half the capital were destroyed.”

“ And what of Maxtha?” Maxtha inquired.

“ Not a word of him or Meztli; you remember she disappeared about the same time. I saw the priest, but I could not obtain an opportunity to speak with him. He appeared terribly excited, and I all engaged with the stirring events. He is a strange man. I wish I could see his face.”

It will be remembered that Maxtha was sold into slavery by Cruzilli without being allowed to partake of fuller water, he was roughly handled, and hurried forward between two stalwart men. They traveled many leagues in this manner, when his conductors halted, and held a short consultation. A peculiar sound, as of a bird chirping was heard, when one of the men caught hold of his master's arm, and dragged him down a flight of stone steps into a dungeon, deep in the earth. Still they hurried forward over rough stones, until they had, apparently, reached a distance of several hundred feet into the very bowels of the earth. Presently they came to a sudden halt, when the last hand was removed from his arm, the master, in his anguish, and, from exhaustion, he fell helplessly upon the ground. One moment and he was alone in a dark cell, with a heavy door closed upon him.

If the soul of man can be tortured, it is very probable, that it is greatly relieved by a sleepless and silent night; but it is difficult to rise to his strength when life itself seems to be at an end. It is impossible to estimate the condition of his poor, exhausted frame. He lay a dead weight and a load of eight from a hanging chain, his ap-

the cell. For an instant, the sudden change rendered him almost blind, but he soon became accustomed to the brilliancy, and gazed with anxious interest upon the person who held the torch. It was a large, muscular man, dressed in the hieroglyphic garb of a priest, with a savage expression of features. In one hand he held the torch, in the other a heavy *macehauill*. After having watched his victim for a few moments, he said:

"We have purchased you at a great price of your captor, to offer as a sacrifice to the war-god, *Huitzilopochtli*, who is angry at the sacrifice of the profane strangers in the capital. The god is wroth with them, and he must be appeased, or the nation will be destroyed."

I may be supposed that Maxtla trembled, knowing, as he did, the laws of his country in these matters. There was no redress, not even by the intercession of the emperor himself, if the priesthood had marked the victim.

"You will remain here," remarked the priest, without appearing to notice the effect of his words; "until the hour assigned for the sacrifice, during which time your beauty wants shall be well cared for."

The priest then laid down his sword, approached the sculptor, and unclasped his arms. That instant, Maxtla sprung to his feet, leaping upon the priest, with the ferociousness of a tiger, and hurled him to the hard stone floor. His strength, however, was not sufficient to the task, and, in a few moments he was reduced, this time bound and fast, and left prostrate on the floor.

This over-exertion, caused Maxtla to swoon, in which condition he lay, he knew not how long. When he awoke, the cell was again illuminated with the rays of a torch, and, turning his head so that he could see her who carried the light, he beheld an old woman. There was that in her features, which for an instant engaged his attention. He gazed steadily upon her. She started back, held the torch before her face, and returned his gaze. Then approaching, looked steadily in his face, and exclaimed:

"Maxtla Ytzehuill! How came you here?"

That voice—that face! Surely they were those of his long absent mother—she who had nurtured him in youth, and had loved him fondly always. He had not seen her since his residence in the city. It was joy, indeed, to meet her now when his soul was tormented and his body suffered so in pain.

"Maxtla Ytzehuill," he replied: "How can I cruel fate! tell me, why am I here? and where are we?"

"I am the priest," she replied. "I was ordered to sacrifice you to the gods, but I fear the victim will have been chosen elsewhere. What say you, my son, would you rather go to the capital?"

"No, I do not want to go. I have no relish for this business, nor do I care for the intelligent god. Do unto this creature, I beg you, kindly."

The woman removed the ligaments, and bathed his wrists, while he related to her the circumstances of his capture and what he had suffered.

She immediately provided him with food and drink, and in a week he was wholly recovered. During this time, he had not seen any person except Mother Ytzecatl, who had charge of the *teocalli*, kept the sanctuary clean, and waited upon the victims destined for sacrifice.

There were at least fifty cells beneath this temple, which could be entered through a long, intricate passage from the side of a mountain, or from the *teocalli* itself. These cells were devoted exclusively to the use of persons intended for sacrifice. It was common for the priest to buy slaves of wandering tribes, or elsewhere, as circumstances might offer. The unfortunate victims were then taken to these cells, where they sometimes were kept for years before being offered to the idols. During this time, they enjoyed all the luxuries of life, except their freedom. When once they were placed in these cells — so to speak — they never left them until called to the sacrificial altar, there to be butchered like dumb beasts.

Maxthi did not remain in the cell, during the week that he had been in the locality, but was with his old nurse and friend, Mother Ytzecatl. They had much to relate. As soon, however, as practicable, he was anxious to return, for he knew that Maxima would be uneasy at his long absence.

When every thing was prepared for him to make a safe escape, his deliverer requested him to accompany her to the fountain to the captives with food. He consented readily, for he had a curiosity to see the variety of subjects for sacrifice. Having provided the slaves with a torch, they left Mother Ytzecatl's private apartment, and entered a long, wide hall, with a row of smaller cells or "cages," on either side. These cells had a heavy outside door, and a strong inside grate. The former was generally open, while the latter was never moved, except when the victim was being placed in, or taken out.

There were fifty of these cages — twenty-five on each side, and nearly every one held a prisoner. Some were playing, some sitting, and some sleeping; while others were weeping, murmuring, and uttering the most heart-rending groans, in view of the fate to which they had been doomed; yet so perfectly accustomed to their lot, that they did not even murmur, that she would speak of sorrow or sorrow.

These cells were, many of them, well furnished with articles of comfort, and evidently intended for the use of the slaves destined for sacrifice. The last one they visited was that in which Maxima had been confined. They passed into this apartment, and looked around. A Mexican woman. Her head was bound in her hair, and she did not take any notice of them.

When Maxtha, in answer to some remark of his companion, the captive started, I held up, and, in a moment sprang forward, crying:

"O Maxtha! Save me! Save me! In remembrance of the good and I care not for you and yours, while in the caves, save me from this fearful—this awful fate!"

"Maxtha!" stammered the astonished young man. "Can it be possible that you are here?"

"Yes! yes! I am here!" she sobbed, wringing her hands and weeping aloud. "Oh, save me! Lord Alhitzel captured me, and gave me to the priest for a sacrifice. If you will save me, I will be your slave—serve you faithfully as long as I live."

As might be expected, Maxtha was not long in determining what course to pursue in reference to the unfortunate captive, and through his influence she was set at liberty, and prepared to accompany him to the capital. In an hour they were out upon the open field, rushing on toward the city with all possible dispatch, and nothing occurred to impede their progress, until they had reached within a short distance to Tej-fu, at the terminus of the northern causeway, leading to the capital.

Here they were overtaken by pursuers, who had followed them, and were then sent back to await orders from the *localli* from which they had escaped.

In this station they lay until the day previous to the wounding of Montzani, at which time all the prisons in the nation were thrown wide open, and the inmates freed to join in the attempt to drive the Spaniards from the country.

It had been a long, tedious period to Maxtha and Mezli, for they were kept in close confinement, and not all well to hold any conversation with persons outside the prison; but, when the doors were opened, by order of Chakdar, Montzani's brother, Maxtha made all haste to the capital. Everywhere he beheld the devastation of war, and the wild state of excitement prevailed among all classes. With a frenzy almost to insanity, he wandered hither and thither, in search of Maxtha, or some one who could give him intelligence of her present situation. There had been such change in the capital that his heart failed him, when he thought that she might be dead—perhaps in the power of Salvia, or under the persecution of her guardian, Lord Alhitzel. The thought set his brain in a fury of excitement, and he hurried about from one locality to another, running rapidly through the denser and that thronged the capital.

He passed all the Spanish garrison, and in a moment, discovered Lord Alhitzel standing upon a high eminence, almost above the fortress. The sight of the plotting villain brought words of execration to Maxtha's lips, and, involuntarily, his grasp tightened upon the hilt of his sabre. Then he heard the sharp report of a musket, and saw the cold steel pitch heading down upon the

hard stone pavement. While still contemplating the event, his ears were saluted with a wild laugh, and on looking up again, he beheld Meztli, with her flowing robe, long waving hair, and a short lance in her hand, standing upon the very summit from which the miserable had fallen.

Maxtla eagerly watched the movements of Meztli. Soon a heavy hand was laid upon his shoulder. Turning, he beheld the strange priest, standing directly in front of him.

"Mazina!" exclaimed Maxtla. "Where is she?"

"Safe!" was the reply. "Have no fear of her. She is beyond the reach of her persecutors."

"Devil?" quickly interposed Maxtla.

"No! she is alive and well; but more of this hereafter. You must now aid the Spaniards to subdue the city."

Maxtla was confounded.

"Why aid the Spaniards?" he repeated.

"Because," answered the priest, "in their triumph is your peace; their defeat is for you a prison and the sacrificial knife."

In as few words as possible, Maxtla, in answer to the priest's inquiries, related all that had occurred to him since the time he was seized by Cruzilli in Lord Ahuitzotl's park.

While they were yet talking, the battle raged with great fury. There was a continual roar of cannon, a sharp crackling of musketry, and the fierce yells of the Aztecs, as they rushed maddly to the assault.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE HASTENING OF EVENTS, OF STORY AND HISTORY.

On the fourth evening following Monterama's death, Mazina was walking slowly to and fro in her lonely home. Her mind was troubled with painful forebodings. Maxtla had been gone many — many months, and no tidings came from him. One long week had Tenatiuh been gone. She promised to return in two days. What could have detained her? Was she too taken from her? Had all her friends been snatched away? What could she do? Where could she fly? Alas! nowhere! She had no place of refuge. Tenatiuh had exacted of her a solemn promise not to leave the chambers under any circumstance, until she returned. Thus far, she had kept her word, but could she always? She had heard the roar of cannon, and watched the smoke as it settled down upon the city and like apparently to cover the walk of death and destruction that was to come; while, at night the conflagration of burning buildings presented a grand, yet awful scene.

The strange locket, with its mysterious portrait, so like herself; and the secret it must express'd by Tonatiuh that it should not be lost, appeared to have a meaning which she did not understand. She had seen Tonatiuh's eyes fill with tears as she examined the locket. She had noted the prophetess tremble with agitation as she viewed the picture, and she wondered what it all meant. She had questioned her, urging an explanation, but was always put off, without being satisfied.

Why did the strange, kind-hearted woman exhibit such deep affection for her? Why was she so mindful of her interest? The strange priest, whom she had known from childhood, yet never saw his face; why should he manifest such remarkable interest for her and Maxtha? Why did he use his influence to bring them together? Why did he ever urge their intimacy? and why was he ever near to warn and defend them from danger?

Such were the thoughts which passed through her mind, as she walked slowly forward and back in that lonely chamber, far into the night.

Hark! she heard footsteps ascending the stairs. Her heart bounded wildly; her limb's trembled violently. The curtain was pushed aside, and Tonatiuh came into the room. She bounded forward with an exclamation of joy. Their hearts beat one against the other in a tearful joy.

Tonatiuh brushed the disheveled hair back from her companion's brow and looked down into her young eyes with an expression of intense love, as she said:

"Rejoice my child, for Maxtha lives! I saw him to day, before the Spanish garrison. He was with the good priest, and I have hurried to bring you the glad news!"

"Thank God!" broke from her lips. "That assurance gives me new life. I now have something to live for; but will he not come and see me?"

"The priest has doubtless told him where you are, and 'tis probable that he will come as soon as he can. I shall see him to-morrow, if possible."

"No, dear mother, do. I must see him, or my heart will surely break;" and again the tears rolled down her cheeks.

Tonatiuh soon prepared to depart again. She first cautioned her charge to remain quiet, and not leave the chambers until she returned. They then embrac'd each other with a fervent kiss and separated.

Maxtha listened to the receding footsteps of Tonatiuh, until she heard the click of the door; then gave herself up to her conflicting emotions. It must have been late at night, when she was startled by a sound of steps, so failing to the chamber, she sprang to her feet. The curtain was again pushed aside, and Maxtha, accompanied by the priest, entered the apartment. One scream, and the suffering girl lay fallen to the breast of her lover, in a state of perfect uncon-

sciousness. She was, however, speedily restored, when their reunion was one of bliss too great for expression.

After awhile, their lips found words to relate their wonderful experiences, the strange priest sat a silent listener; and not until the gray tinge of morning was visible in the east, did Maxtha and the priest prepare to depart. Urging Mazim to be cheerful, the two brave men stepped out into the morning twilight, and were soon gone toward the city, where the great battle for life and country and glory was so soon to be fought and won and lost again forevermore.

Another step! A noise in the outer chamber. Now it was in the passage-way. Was one of her friends returning? She had thrilling thoughts of a kiss from Maxtha, as the step drew near, and stood with open arms to welcome her beloved. The curtain opened. She sprang back with an exclamation of alarm, for the detested Toluca stood before her!

"So, so! my pretty bairn," he said with a sneer; "you are caught at last."

Toluca came boldly forward, and laid his hand upon her shoulder, when she darted away as from the touch of a leper, and cried:

"Oh, leave me! Why are you here, hated man? Leave me to myself!"

"Indeed!" he replied; "I could not think of it. I have sworn that you shall be mine, dead or alive, and I meant what I said. This night I will fulfill my oath, so you may as well be quiet. You are now in my power, beyond interference."

The blood had almost ceased to throb in her veins, and her heart lay still in her breast. Horror stared her boldly in the face. She strove to nerve herself for the unequal struggle.

"I shall not submit to any insult," she firmly said; "I shall defend myself as best I can, from your polluting touch. Wretch, I scorn you!"

"So I suppose," responded the villain, indifferently. "I have had, already, sufficient experience to convince me of that; but, submit you shall. These walls are strong and thick; and, if they were not, it would make no difference, as no one is hear to hear. I could not have asked, nor planned a more fitting place to compel you to my purposes."

"Toluca!" and Mazim was deathly calm. "So sure as the gods give me life, I will strike you down. Away with you, I say, or by the great sun, I will let out your heart's vile blood!"

"I like your spirit by the gods!" he remarked, with a hideous smile. "I fancy your courage, indeed I do;" and he stepped forward with extended arms.

"Buck! villain!" she cried in agony of spirit. "Buck! I say, ponder one moment, ere you take another step!"

"Ponder?" he answered, in a mocking tone, while his eyeball glowed with its hellish fire. "Ponder? I don't understand. Then you stand at my profession of love, and I understand it quite well. Now the gods have indeed! He that has to steer a bad road, has

"Why carry? Come! I will tell you to my heart," and again he moved forward.

Mazina sprang quickly to one side, drew from her bosom a short blade of steel, and made an attempt to reach the passage-way leading from the chamber; but, in an instant, a strong arm was clasped round her waist. She struck with all her strength. The blade entered deep into the right side of the villain, cutting a fearful, yet not fatal wound.

So unexpected was the blow, that he suddenly let go his hold,退了一步，倒退了两步，然后喊道：

"You have murdered me!"

"I warned you in time, but you would not believe me," she firmly replied. "I will die, before submitting to insult. If you approach me, you do so at your peril. I am desperate—made so by your cruelty."

"We will see!" and again he advanced, but this time more cautiously, but with determination written upon his face.

At this instant, Mazili, a Spanish stiletto in her hand, and eyes fully flashing fire, came into the chamber.

"Final!" she shouted. "Back, or I will sink this weapon in your perfused heart. Back I say!" and her dark eyes glittered like steel as she spoke.

Tolera was then struck. For a moment he appeared undecided what course to pursue, while his gaze was fixed upon her with evident uneasiness.

She stood firm and resolute, her hand grasping tightly the ivory hilt of her keen stiletto.

"Will you leave the room, or shall I free you from it?" he asked, his voice harsh with rage. "I will not be foiled by a woman. Stand back!"

Mazili's foot was moving carefully along on the floor apparently feeling for some particular point. Tolera stepped boldly in front of her, and with a fierce gesture, pointed to the passage.

Mazili's face was colourless, but as defiant as the indomitable one.

"Will you go?" the now bold and wounded wretch shouted.

"No!"

"Then I —"

A quick step followed. Tolera disappeared suddenly through an opening in the floor, caused by the falling of a trap-door on which Tolera stood. Down, down he went into a deep dark chasm, striking his head on the bottom.

Mazili stood still; she did not appear to breathe. Mazina was covered with an instant, and trembled violently. A low moan came up from the depths below. Mazina sprang forward, wound her arms around Mazili's neck, and wept as a child.

"I forgive you, my friend. I have done a deed for which the gods will not forgive you," said the pale, passionless girl. "Tolera is a villain, and ought to die. It was he, who murdered my mother—villain, and ought to die. It was he, who murdered my mother—

did it in cold blood, in the little cave below, because she befriended you. Now, let him lie and consider upon his past deeds. He will have ample time for reflection, and abundance of wickedness to revert to." Saying this, she waved her hand and was gone.

Mazina was alone over that chasm, from which came a voice of suffering and despair! .

The sun had not advanced far up in the heavens on that eventful morning, when Tonatiuh rushed into the secret chambers where Mazina sat weeping. The old prophetess was frightful to gaze upon. Her hair was tangled and matted around her head; her features were covered with wounds and blood; her eyes were red and inflamed, and glared like the fires of Popocatepetl.

Mazina sprang to her feet, stared wonderingly upon her friend, who reeled forward, fell heavily on a stool, and exclaimed:

"Lost! Lost! All is lost!"

Mazina clasped her arms around Tonatiuh's neck, and begged to know the cause of her great grief.

"Lost! lost!" sobbed the strange woman, her eyes filling with tears. "All is lost!"

"What is lost?" inquired Mazina, brushing back the damp locks from her friend's brow. "You are badly wounded! Your face is cut terribly; and you are all covered with blood."

"Not dangerously wounded in body, but mortally at heart. I will tell you, so that you can understand. Our peace and future happiness, depend upon the success of the Spaniards over the Aztecs. I know that you think this strange, but, by and by, you will understand it better. Last night, the Spaniards attempted to leave the capital. They were blockaded, and all means of obtaining provisions or water, were cut off by the Aztecs. While Montezuma lived, they had hope of ultimate triumph; but, after his death, Cuauhtemoc was made emperor. He, possessing a more warlike spirit than his predecessor, soon placed the Spaniards in a dangerous position. Cortez planned his order of retreat, and attempted to carry it into effect last night. The result was one of the most desperate and fearful struggles this nation ever experienced, and the Aztecs were victorious. They destroyed all but a few of the Spaniards, who are now fleeing precipitately—ahs! they know not where."

"I heard the tumult," Mazina answered; "but I had so much, and such deep trouble, that I paid little heed to what I heard. Toluca is now in a deep chasm beneath this floor."

Tonatiuh started like one touched with fire.

"What did you say?" she exclaimed.

Mazina related all that had occurred during the past few days—how she had seen Maxtla and the priest,—the unexpected intrusion of Toluca, with a minute recital of the scene that passed between them, and the incomprehensible interposition of Mezzi, who fell the victim by precipitating him through a trap-door in the floor.

Tonatiuh, like Mazina, was surprised to learn that there was such an aperture in the floor.

"I am glad that he is safe!" Tonatiuh said. "Henceforth, we shall, probably, have no more trouble with him. Meztli is a determined and a courageous girl."

"A great-hearted one also," added Mazina; "but, what of these strangers, of whom you were speaking? Are they not our country's enemies?" and she looked inquiringly into the features of her friend.

"Assist me now to dress my wounds," remarked the prophetess; "and change my garments, then I will tell you all."

That night — the first after the great battle of the causeway, the Spaniards occupied the inclosure, surrounded by the wall, in which were the secret apartments; and, during the long, lonely hours of the night, Tonatiuh and Mazina watched and listened to hear the approaching footsteps of Maxtla or the strange priest, but daylight dawned, without their having heard the welcome tread.

* * * * *

Nearly eleven months passed by after the defeat of the Spaniards on the fatal causeway — at the period of evacuating the capital; what a change had taken place during that time! Out of the little band of disarmed and disheartened soldiers, who survived that fearful slaughter, sprang up, almost by miracle, a large and formidable army, which marched again to the capital, headed by the immortal Cortez.

How this was accomplished, was a wonder, and it is most probable that no head, save Cortez, could have consummated so magnificent a triumph. At first he had been reduced almost to starvation. He and his little remnant of followers were compelled to kill and devour the flesh of their horses; but, gradually, he advanced, step by step; gained a little here and a little there; obtained victories where certain defeat appeared inevitable; quelled riots, discord, and discontent; gained allies at every turn, until he again stood triumphant at the head of an army, far superior to that with which he had previously entered the capital.

He had caused thirteen vessels of different sizes to be built, and they were tried on the waters of Zahuapan — a river of Tlascala. Then, they were taken to pieces, and the timber, anchors, iron-work, sails, &c., &c., were placed upon the shoulders of *tamemes*, or porters, and, in this manner, conveyed over steep embankments, rough mountain paths, and through deep forests, to Tezcuco lake.

With such infinite perseverance as this, and determination of purpose, as fixed as the stars in the heavens, who wonders at his success? Not one day out of the eleven months was he idle. His whole soul, sight, mind, and strength, were centered upon this one point — the salvation of the nation; and to this end, every resource of his genius was brought into play.

Thus, at the end of one month less than a year, we find him back, having as a dark pall around the capital, with his forces so arranged as to command every avenue leading to the city. His brigantines

had been launched, manned, armed, and were already masters of the lake; thereby placing the capital in a close state of blockade.

During this lapse of time, there was no change in the Aztec monarchy. Cuithchim, Moutezuma's brother, after a short reign of four months, died with the small-pox.* He was succeeded by Quauhtemotzin, or Guatemozin, he was called by the Spaniards.

This prince was young, yet amply experienced in military matters. He was not long in making himself perfectly acquainted with all the movements of the invaders. He had spies in every section of the country, sought allies of all nations, buried the hatchet of discord and enmity with disaffected tribes, and soon gathered around him a legion of warriors, formidable and desperate.

He commenced immediate preparations to meet the Spaniards; sent from the capital all useless members of the population, called around him all the potent vassals from the surrounding country, heaped up stores of provisions against the day of need, and sought by every means to strengthen the defences of the city. He reviewed the troops daily, excited them to deeds of desperation by wild harangues, encouraged his people to attack the white man wherever he could be found, and offered a price upon every Spanish head.

This was the state of affairs in the capital, when Cortez set his stakes for a siege.

CHAPTER XX.

THE GLORY OF THE "HALLS OF MONTEZUMA" DEPARTS — THE REVOLUTIONS AFTER THE CONQUEST — CONCLUSION.

Cortez had so stationed his army, as to hold full command of all the causeways, while his brigantines cut off communication by the lake. He had, also, dispatched a company to the hill of Chapultepec, to destroy the aqueduct which supplied the city with water.† Thus dispersed, he commenced active demonstrations by furious assaults upon the fated capital.

On the first occasion of his first penetration into the suburbs of

* "This fatal epidemic was imported into the country by a negro slave in Narváez's fleet. It first appeared in Coatzacoalcos, and swept over the land like a pestilence, leaving desolation in its train. It was introduced into the city of Mexico by a negro slave, who had been captured by the Indians, and sold to the Emperor." — *History of Mexico*, by G. L. G. de la Condamine.

† The aqueduct, by which the city was supplied, was constructed of stone, and ran from the waterfalls of Tlalpan, through the hills of Tlalpan, Tlaxcoapan, and Tlalnepantla, to the city, the distance being about two miles, and the hill of Chapultepec, — some two and a half miles distant.

the city, he was agreeably surprised to find hovering around his person, the strange recruit of the fortress, who saved his life in several instances, during his previous sojourn in the capital. He also discovered the black robe of a priest, in whom, at that period, he became deeply interested.

If Cortez calculated upon a speedy termination of the war, by a surrender of the capital, he was greatly mistaken. He had yet to learn the indomitable courage, perseverance, and determination of the Aztecs, when led by a brave, shrewd, and able commander. Cortez was not, however, content to remain idle, and wait the tedious process of reducing the city by starvation and thirst; he was continually penetrating into the suburbs, carrying with him death and destruction. In these sorties, he engaged the populace in battle, burnt their houses, and still waste the capital.

After a weary struggle of months, through all kinds of fortune, which will rival the siege of Troy, the memorable morning of August 13th, 1521, finally dawned upon the smoking, pestering, smoky capital. It was the day of slaughter, and the day of triumph. Cortez had fully availed himself of his advantage, until he had laid in ruins nearly all the city — until heaps of Aztecs lay piled up in every street; on every azotea where their bodies exposed to the scorching rays of the sun, created a stench almost insufferable, — until the last few were reduced to the most painful extremes.

In all this strife — through all these fearful scenes, the strange Aztec traitor (one, it will be remembered, shot off Lord Almirez!) and his crew, stood treacherously by the side of the Spaniards. They had indeed distinguished themselves — had won laurels of renown, not only in the service of Cortez, but of all who witnessed their bravery and talents. They had received many wounds, but still fought on — nothing daunted everywhere.

At the close of the siege, Cortez drew off his troops, and made over to the people they wanted, brave Guatemozin, to surrender and save the lives of his countrymen.

"Guatemozin will I tell where he was," was the Indian's reply, "and I will call to interview with the Spaniards."

Had Cortez but known what must have been their intent toward the treacherous Indians, to have induced such a reply. It was worthy of the man and his people.

The loyal Aztecs were conquered. Through slaughter which glorified the memory of Cortez with them, the race were made to perish — men, women, and children alike, were cut down; and Guatemozin was, at length, captured. Cortez commanded him to his presence. As Guatemozin approached, Cortez advanced, and received him with the most open courtesy.

"I have come to defend myself, and my people," said the Indian, "I am now reduced to this state. You will deal with me as you wish."

Cortez was filled with admiration at the courage and noble bearing of his royal captive, and assured him, that he should be treated with all honor. He dispatched an escort to conduct the royal family to the *azotea*. The escort soon returned, accompanied by the royal household, among whom was Mazina.

The scene which followed, was one of deep interest. It was the moment of the Spaniards' triumph in the new world, and the downfall of the Aztec empire, — such a moment as only comes at intervals of centuries.

Guatemozin begged that the Indians might be stopped, his subjects provided with food, and allowed to leave the infected city. This was readily granted, when the unhappy monarch, with his family and friends, sat down to the sumptuous banquet prepared for the occasion.

At this moment, the man in black robe and mask, who had excited such personal interest in the mind of Cortez, stepped from the ranks. He raised the black cowl from his head.

"General Cortez!"

Cortez started. Before him was a *man of his own country!* His thick, black beard and mustache were carefully trimmed; and there was an expression in his countenance, which puzzled the Spanish general, who gazed fixedly into his face.

"Who are you?" asked Cortez.

"Your own cousin," replied the uncowled priest.

"Luis?" gasped the general.

"Ay, the same!"

"Great God! how did you come here? We thought you dead!" exclaimed Cortez, with intense feeling.

"Nearly twenty-two years ago," he answered, and his eyes were moistened with tears, "a Spanish ship was wrecked on the eastern coast of this country. It was a terrific storm, and appeared as if heaven and earth, with the mighty deep, had conspired to render the scene memorable. On that ship were many souls, who, for days had been drifting before the tornado. Among them were two brothers — young men — and their wives. They each had a darling child, — one a girl, and the other a boy, both being about the same age — a little less than a year old." The man paused, wiped his eyes with the sleeve of his bloody robe, then proceeded: — "When the wreck came in sight of the rocky coast, all hope of escape was abandoned. The wind still blew a hurricane, the sea was dashed into fury, and the ship tossed like a drunken thing. On she went toward the breakers, rushing furiously upon the rocks. She struck broadside, bounded away like a frightened gull, and trembled upon the crest of the reeling wave; then, on she came again, stern foremost. This time, there was a tremor, a crash, and the ship went to pieces. I was standing upon the prow of the ship, when she struck, and held one of the little children, the girl in my arms; while its mother clung to my waist to prevent being swept away by the waves,

which were constantly breaking over us. The shock threw us far out into the rolling surge. I held to the child, and clung to the weeping mother; but, she was torn from my grasp, and I lost sight of her forever." Again he paused, wiped his eyes as before, and appeared deeply affected. Every one present were so entirely absorbed in the narrative, as to take no notice of what was passing around. The man continued: — "When I arose to the surface of the water, the ship had disappeared, and not a soul was in sight. That instant, a huge wave passed over me; and, as it rolled on, I saw the form of the little boy, a few feet beneath the surface. I eagerly dove down, caught hold of his garments, and brought him up out of the water. While struggling to retain them both and reach the shore, a mighty avalanche of water came rolling on, raised me and my burdens high upon its trembling summit, and, with one hurl, carried us far up on the rocks. I was severely bruised, but had managed to protect the children. As soon as I could recover, I rose to my feet, and gazed around in hopes of discovering some other one of the unfortunate crew, who had escaped. I could see nothing but bits of the wreck, floating on the waves, and, along the shore, huge piles of rocks, extending as far as the eye could reach. When I was fully satisfied that the children and myself, were the only survivors of that fearful wreck, I took the little ones in my arms, and ascended the mountain. As I reached the summit, I discovered several Indians, far down in the vale. They did not discover us, and when they had passed on out of sight, I descended into the valley. It was impressed on my mind that we should be killed if we remained white, as we were. So I found some berries, unroasted the children, and stained their bodies with the juice, which gave them a dark, tan color. I then buried in the earth, all their clothes except a small cloth placed about their loins; the climate being hot, they were not uncomfortable. This accomplished, I dressed myself, and went through with the same process. Reserving only my pants, I buried the rest with the children's. In this manner I proceeded boldly into the country, and was not long in finding inhabitants. They manifested considerable surprise at finding us, but we were treated kindly, our complexion being so near their own, doubtless saving our lives. We were brought immediately to this great city, and here sold as slaves. Fortune, however, so far favored me, that I never lost sight of the children. The boy was sold to a stone-cutter, named Ytzcatl, and, when old enough, learned the trade, from which he arose to freedom and renown. The girl was sold to a noble; and, as she grew, her beauty developed, until she attracted the attention of Montezuma, who caused her to be adopted. Her situation was therefore changed from slave to daughter, and the master to guardian. I was sold as a slave in the temple, but, eventually, succeeded in becoming one of its priests, in which position I have been, nominally, for over fifteen years, and during all that time, I have watched over the interests of those

children — Maxita and Mazina — with a father's care. I was instrumental in bringing them together, in causing an affection to spring up in their hearts, which has bound them together, forever. I — ”

He was interrupted by the strange recruit, who stepped forward, gaze stealing into his features, and exclaimed :

“ Don Luis de Velasco ! ”

The words were winged with pathos. Cortez sprang to his feet.

The priest trembled from head to foot. Suddenly, and as by magic, the outer garments fell from the recruit, revealing the ample form of a long, gay, and rich robe, sparkling with jewels, precious stones, and gold. He then threw off a tight-fitting cap, which had concealed much of his features, brushed back the heavy mass of his dark hair, which fell in confused disorder upon his shoulders, when the fair, full, and symmetrical form of Tonatiuh the prophetess, was presented to their astonished gaze.

Mazina sprang forward, threw her arms around the woman's neck, and wept aloud.

“ O mother ! ” she sobbed; “ I thought that you were dead ! It has been so long since I have seen or heard of you.”

Tonatiuh led Mazina to the priest, and inquired :

“ Is this young lady, the person you saved from that wreck ? ” and her voice trembled with suppressed emotion.

“ It is ! ” he replied. His keen black eyes were fixed searchingly upon her.

“ And you are her father ? ” Tonatiuh continued; her voice scarce above a whisper.

“ Yes ! she is my own daughter,” he answered mechanically, not appearing to comprehend the astounding transformations which were passing before his eyes.

One moment, Mazina was held in the woman's arms — a burning kiss pressed upon her cheek; she then reached out her hand toward the priest, and, in broken accents, sobbed :

“ Luis ! have you forgotten Doña Sonora ? ”

“ Doña Sonora ! ” gasped the man. “ She was my wife ! ”

“ Dear husband ! and I am her ! ”

“ Sonora ! My long-lost wife ! ” and he caught hold of her arm; while he gazed into her face, as if he would scan her very soul.

“ Did you place this locket on Mazina's neck ? ”

“ I did ! ” he replied.

“ Was it not your wife's portrait ? ”

“ It was ! ”

“ Did she not have your miniature ? ”

“ She did ! ”

“ Is that it ? ” and she removed from beneath her robe, a large gold locket, and presented it to him.

He eagerly opened the locket, gazed first upon the picture, then upon the woman. His eyes filled with tears, and his arms clasped around his long-lost wife and child.

There was not a dry eye upon that *azotea*. That reunion after an absence of more than twenty years, and under such peculiar circumstances, was a scene widely different from that to which they had been accustomed. During the past four months of siege, of famine, of blood, and of death. At that instant, a figure, covered with dust, blood, and wounds, crawled up to the *azotea*, and came feebly forward to visit the group. Mazina, breaking from the embrace of her father and mother, flew across the room, and was clasped in the arms of Maxtli Yiztli. A slim youth, with long, flowing hair, approached close to the group around the table.

Maxtli went forward, and an explanation made of what had been said; a dialogue which he manifested considerable surprise, but warmly greeted his uncle and aunt, and again clasped Mazina to his heart.

Then there was a slight movement, when Tolteca — again mysteriously brought into light and life, as if by power of the evil one — having crept up to the *azotea*, rushed upon the lovers with frantic desperation, and would have dispatched them both in an instant, had not the youth sprung forward, and, with one stroke of his cutlass, completely severed the right arm of the villain, causing his up-lifeless body to fall headlong on the floor.

"Puff!" his ally cried, dropping the point of his sword. "You shall not triumph. Meztl has been recognized!"

He turned with his discourse, and there stood Meztl, her face full of sorrow for her victim, while she said as she bade Maxtli and Mazina farewell: "This is true. The owl priest that we, but poor Luis Velasco, termed Gatzitzin, who had been deeply interested in the secret, and counselled him, that if he had his desire of the 'white hand' stranger,' the scene would be complete.

He had intended to tell that he was the person who had often beset the loves in that direction, stating that he first used it, in exorcising a night pass unknown among the subjects of his illustrious master, and known the state of feeling entertained by the populace toward their sovereign.

When the grand Fabio's cabinet were made known to Cortez, the news was communicated from the *azotea*, and shot.

On that occasion that Maxtli and Mazina should be married, as the chief of the state. Mazina blushingly consented, when the Spanish commander, Father Olachea, the army chaplain, to perform the ceremony. Their names, as given at the trial, were Soledad de Velasco, and Alonzo de Costa.

* * * * *

Four years followed, and the great capital had been renovated, resplendent with the decorations of the Viceroyalty in New Spain. Don Alonzo, the Lord of Velasco, with his recovered wife and daughter, had built a villa near the *azotea* and Meztl, had made a long time ago, a little distance from the valley, an and which were also surrounded by the foliage of the forest.

They located themselves for a permanent residence, in the beautiful city of Iztapalapan, from which they could overlook the capital, and far across the valley was visible the wall, in which were located the secret chambers, and to which place they made frequent visits.

They owned a large palace and lived happily together, and many were the times that Don Luis de Velasco was importuned to relate his adventures, while with the Aztecs. Here Sonora his wife, no longer Tonatiuh the prophetess, would sit hours together, and relate to her little gran lehíl Iren, the particulars of her own trials, from the time she found herself lying in a nook of rocks, after the great wreck, down to the moment of finding her husband and child, whom she had so long mourned for as dead.

Here, Mazina — who was still called by that name, and Alenzo de Costa — Maxtla, the sculptor, passed many, many happy days; and here, also, was Mezli,—the strange child of the Aztecs. She was faithful to her pledge, given to Alenzo when he rescued her from the "cages" under the *teocalli*; yet he had more to be grateful for than she, and the kind-hearted Aztec was far from being a slave in the family of her friends. She was a dear and cherished companion, and Mazina's children called her "Aunt Mezzi," for many a year of blissful association.

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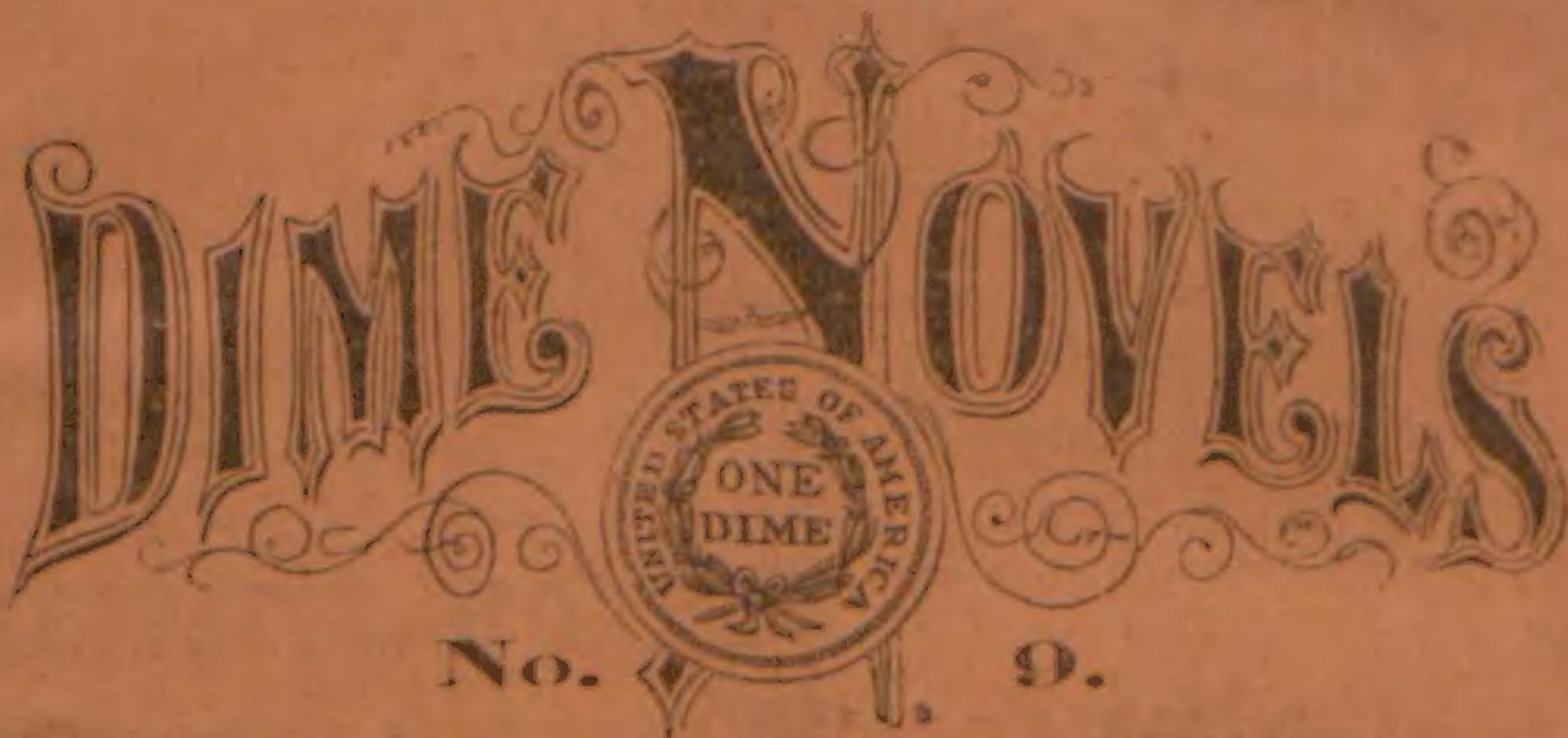
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